

The Productive Eye: Conceptualising Learning in the Design Museum

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ABSTRACT

My thesis explores accounts of learning about design enabled through visits to exhibitions at the Design Museum, London, and drawn from purposive samples of adult visitors and exhibition curators. The research adopts a qualitative, multiple method case study strategy, which takes the Design Museum as its local context and consists of a small-scale museum visitor survey, a visitor research group, and semi-structured interviews with exhibition curators. The literature called upon is from the fields of museum studies and museum education; design history, design culture and design studies; visitor studies and learning theory. Through this review I develop a framework for data analysis which sets out a threefold notion of the museum concept as Active, Distinctive and Engaging. Framed by a critique of generic approaches to, and generalising tendencies about, learning in the museum, my thesis then explores the extent to which learning at the Design Museum is revealed as distinctive to its local context. These characteristics inform a conceptualisation of learning which I coin as the Productive Eye. The Productive Eye has two significant features. It is grounded in the specificity of the discipline of design and its concomitant history of exhibition design. Furthermore, it reveals a complementarity between visitor experiences, learning and curatorial practice. Such findings are atypical within debates concerning intellectual access to the museum and within large-scale visitor studies, which more often reveal disjunctions between visitor and curatorial constituencies. Through providing an integrated, holistic account of theory and practice this study contributes both to professional practice at the Design Museum and to scholarship in the field of museum education. In conclusion, I pose the question as to whether there might be distinctive characteristics to visitor learning in other typologically specific museums, with commensurate implications for traditional understandings of museum professionalism in learning and curating.

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Given the part-time character of the EdD which combines professional practice with academic study, the impact on family time has been significant. Heartfelt gratitude goes to my husband Gerald Jones for energetically rising to the challenge and embracing very many hours of additional childcare, and to my children Anya and Jared for their unwavering good humour throughout.

This thesis is entirely my own work and as such I am solely responsible for any unintended errors. It is dedicated to my late mother Renee, and to my father Colin, who together instilled in me a great love of learning.

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PERSONAL STATEMENT: THE DOCTORAL JOURNEY

I decided museum education was the job for me twenty years ago whilst undertaking a graduate internship as a curatorial research assistant to the director of the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester, upstate New York. In my first week poring over microfiche documents, two significant findings emerged: that *Still Life with Fish* by William Merritt-Chase was misattributed, and that my compulsion to share this news with the museum's visitors made museum education, rather than collection research, a much better professional fit. With the director's blessing, I relocated to the Education department. Revisiting earlier research journals from my doctoral study, I stumbled across one I kept whilst at the MAG, Rochester. Rereading it, I realise that this internship sowed not only the formative seeds of a subsequent career in museum education, but also an enduring interest in the museum as institutional concept, and the role of education in the museum. My (regrettably clumsy) closing reflection on the experience of the internship ran as follows:

It seems that the concept of a gallery/museum has definitely moved from that of a 'historical tomb' to something of a business organisation, economically grounded and educationally geared.
(Charman, 1991)

This personal statement reflects on how the EdD has enabled me to explore, develop and refine my early interest in museums and museum education within the overarching purpose of professional development. In so doing it aims to provide the reader with a summary and reflection on my doctoral journey across the following course components:

- Years One and Two - four taught modules, each producing a c5000 word written paper and culminating in a portfolio with a 2000 word reflective statement.
- Year Three - the Institution Focused Study, an in-depth workplace based research endeavour of c20, 000 words.
- Years Four to Five - a concise doctoral thesis of c45, 000 words.

Having considered each of these components below, I conclude with a consideration of the key learning outcomes afforded by the experience of the EdD.

Taught Modules

At its core, the EdD aims to provide students with the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of professionalism, the professional context of education, and their own professional role and work. In the first module, *Foundations of Professionalism*, I explored my role as a curator in the Interpretation and Education department at Tate Modern, where from 1999 to 2006 I managed a busy programme for schools and teachers. Entitled ‘Uncovering Professionalism in the Art Museum: an exploration of key characteristics of the working lives of education curators at Tate Modern’, this theoretical paper enabled me to position my professional practice within broader theories and histories of formal education and museum curating. Comparatively, museum education is a nascent profession, and as such this paper made a modest contribution to the development of the field, and was published in Tate’s online research journal (Charman, 2005). Subsequently I was invited to lead the opening session at Engage’s professional summer school in Arona, Italy, based on themes in my paper (Engage being the national association for gallery education). The enduring relevance of the question of professionalism in museum education is further illustrated by an invitation to participate in the *Tate Encounters* AHRC research project in 2008, one component of which was to develop an archive of Tate’s educational provision. This demonstrates another learning outcome of the EdD, of student participation in wider academic and professional communities, with the aim of enlarging experience and enhancing one’s own professionalism.

The two *Methods of Enquiry* modules enabled me to engage with contemporary research and analysis in my field, as a basis for reflection on my own and others’ professional experience and workplace practice. My

MoE 1 proposal, which I presented at the doctoral school's Poster Conference in 2005, was for research investigating how teachers use the art museum for their own professional development and the extent to which this shapes professional identities. Entitled 'Exploring the Impact of CPD in the Art Museum on Teachers' Identities in Art and Design: a Research Proposal', the most significant outcome of this paper was in calling attention to the potential influence of subject specificity in shaping teacher identities and practice.

MoE 2 provided an opportunity to put into practice my newly acquired knowledge and understanding of research epistemologies, theories and approaches, through carrying out a small-scale enquiry which included collecting and analysing field data. This paper was entitled 'Uncovering Professionalism in Cultural Sector Learning' and revealed the extent to which the dimensions of professional practice are shaped by the specificity of institutional subject specialism, an area which continues to be of concern in this thesis. I interviewed Heads of Learning at the British Museum, the British Library and the Science Museum in an effort to look beyond my immediate institutional context and afford my research greater breadth of perspective. Key learning outcomes from this paper were the richness of field data and the importance of concision and focus in presenting research and undertaking analysis, coupled with an emergent understanding of the impact of institutional and disciplinary histories and structures on professional practice in museum education. At this point in the degree I commenced teaching a small number of sessions on the Institute of Education's flagship MA Museums and Galleries in Education programme, illustrative of the practical application of the academic research endeavour of the EdD.

For the final element of the taught modules I selected the *Leadership and Learning* course, through which I explored the relationship between contemporary cultural policy and museum education, using the notion of the 'learning society' as a heuristic device. As an enrichment activity I took a short course on Continental Philosophy concurrent with this module in order to develop a better understanding of the core epistemological concerns arising through my work.

Institution Focused Study

In-between the taught modules and the IFS I took up a new position as Head of Learning at the Design Museum. The IFS provided a valuable opportunity to focus on pedagogy within museum education in design. My IFS was entitled 'Designerly Learning: Workshops for Schools at the Design Museum'. It presented a conceptualisation and pedagogic model of learning in the museum's workshop programme based on interviews with my team of educators who devise and teach on the programme. In this paper I coined the term 'designerly learning' as a concept that models characteristics of design thinking and practice to the learner through the experience of a workshop using the museum's handling collections. Arguably, it is a concept particular to the Design Museum, rooted in its distinctive disciplinary context of design. An abridged paper was published in *Design Education: an International Journal* 15.3 (2010). Commentary by the peer review board indicated the extent to which museum pedagogy in relation to contemporary design is as yet a largely unmapped field, into which my paper makes an early in-road.

Thesis

My thesis pursues the directions for further research identified in my IFS, which concluded with a proposal to broaden the locus of my research from formal learning activities at the Design Museum to an exploration of the learning enabled through an exhibition visit, based on research encompassing the perspectives of adult visitors and exhibition curators. As part of the development of my thinking I led a workshop at the Engage summer school at Kilkenny in 2009 and presented twice at the Institute's annual work in progress seminars. These were valuable experiences in enabling me to refine my thinking. My thesis has transpired to be an exercise in cartography and navigation. Cartography in that the research endeavour has enabled me to map salient perspectives on the museum concept, the constitution of the discipline of design, and adult learning and visitor studies, as befits the nature of the case study which places significant value on the particularities of

context. Navigation, because of the need to chart a considered and deliberate course through these perspectives, in order to arrive at the key clusters of ideas that underpin the ensuing presentation of data, analysis, findings and critical reflection. The mapping metaphor is also pertinent in that just as a map is schematic and doesn't include every typographical detail, so too my thesis is highly selective. However, selectivity does not betoken a narrowness of understanding or inconsequentiality of subject matter. The contemporary relevance of the relationship between museum learning and visitor studies is illustrated by *Engage* 26 (Autumn 2010), which takes these two areas of museum practice as its foci. The journal includes a short paper entitled 'From One Hit Wonders to Super Specialists: Visitor Studies at the Design Museum' drawing on my literature review and co-authored with the museum's Head of Communications (Charman & Chanter, 2010). This evidences the EdD's aim to develop students' intellectual and research skills that have a demonstrable grounding within, and make a contribution to, professional practice.

The experience of the EdD has been a journey encompassing a rich topography of substantial professional development opportunities. From Tate Modern and the Design Museum via Arona and Kilkenny, I have developed extensive new knowledge, skills and understanding, demonstrated through a small (but I hope not insignificant), number of presentations, publications and teaching experience. The acquisition of knowledge regarding theoretical and historical perspectives on professionalism in education has afforded greater insight into my own practice and that of my peers. Key skills include an improved ability to engage critically with a range of forms of research and academic and professional writing. This is of particular value to me as my work straddles two policy contexts, those of education and culture, with the commensurate need to develop familiarity and facility with the research languages and practices within each sector. The institutional focus of my IFS and this thesis have seen me delve into the history of design, a subject with which I had previously enjoyed only a passing acquaintance, having studied English Literature as an undergraduate, and then History of Art for my Master's degree. However, my commitment to understanding museum

education in respect of the disciplinary specificity of the institution renders my understanding of design very much a work in progress. To this end, the next steps in my research are to publish on my thesis (commencing with a brief reflection on the Productive Eye, to be included in this autumn's edition of Tate Papers) and to explore funding streams for a seminar series which explores public education in design museums in an international context, as I believe there is much uncharted and fertile territory to be considered in this regard. I am also keen to explore further the distinctiveness of design exhibitions as environments for learning, and to this end have been working with the University of Brighton on a Collaborative Doctoral Award which I will co-supervise, should our AHRC bid be successful.

Ultimately, the EdD has enabled me to develop theories and ideas about learning in the design museum which I can say, with hand upon heart, are my own. With this comes a growth in my professional and academic confidence and a continuing fascination with the complex and compelling landscape of museum education.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

My thesis explores how learning is understood to take place within the Design Museum's public programme of temporary exhibitions, from the perspectives of independent adult visitors and exhibition curators. By moving from a characterisation of respondents' accounts to a conceptualisation of learning, I investigate whether any distinctive characteristics of that learning emerge. In pursuing these questions, my thesis aims to take the reader on a journey from the broad and substantive issue underpinning the research, namely a critique of generalising tendencies towards museum learning, to a detailed exploration of how learning is enabled through the local context of exhibitions at the Design Museum, where I have worked since 2007 as Head of Learning. In conclusion, I consider the implications of my research findings both for professional practice in my institution and, in respect of the substantive issue, for scholarship in museum education.

i) Research Questions

In working towards a conceptualisation of learning at the Design Museum, I ask the following questions:

1. *What are the key institutional, disciplinary and theoretical perspectives for independent adult learning at the Design Museum?*

This question is addressed in Chapter Two: Literature Review. By investigating these perspectives a cluster of key ideas and terms is generated through which I analyse my data. Chapter Three: Designing the Study presents and discusses my research design in respect of its ethical, epistemological, theoretical and methodological dimensions.

2. *How do adult visitors and exhibition curators at the Design Museum describe and understand the role of exhibitions in enabling learning today?*

These findings are set out in Chapter Four: Data Presentation. Research respondents include:

- fifty museum visitors who each completed a Visit Card describing their motivations for visiting, and immediate reflections subsequent to their visit;
- a Visitor Research Group comprising five independent adult visitors to the museum, in which I explore the strategies visitors use for effective meaning-making in the exhibition, and how their learning is shaped by the environment of the exhibition;
- four semi-structured interviews with colleagues in the museum's Exhibitions Department, who curate the temporary exhibitions programme. In interviewing the curators I discuss their ambitions for curating design exhibitions, and how they envisage visitor experience therein.

3. a) *How can learning be characterised through the context of an exhibition visit?*

b) *To what extent is this characterisation distinctive to the Design Museum?*

This question is addressed in Chapter Five: Data Analysis, using the cluster of ideas and terms arising from the Literature Review.

4. a) *How does my study contribute to professional practice at the Design Museum, and more broadly to the field of museum education?*

b) *What are the emergent questions and implications?*

These issues are addressed in Chapter Six: Conclusion, in which I return to and extend the substantive issue discussed in this Introduction.

ii) Structure of the Thesis

I begin in *Chapter One: Introduction* by outlining the context and substantive issue from which my thesis emerges.

Chapter Two: Literature Review surveys the key institutional, disciplinary and theoretical contexts for conceptualising learning in the Design Museum.

Commencing with a brief summary of the educational role of the museum, literature is reviewed in relation to the formation of design as a discreet discipline, and to theories concerning visitor studies and learning in the museum. I acknowledge the

metropolitan, Anglo-American and European biases of this case study and its concurrent limitations. However, to contextualise my research further lies beyond the scope of this thesis, which as an institutional case study necessitates a tightly refined focus.

Chapter Three: Designing the Research presents the research design through detailed discussion of my chosen methodology, methods, theoretical perspectives, the question of validity and the ethical considerations of ‘insider’ research.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation sets out and discusses the main themes arising from the three methods of data-gathering: Visit Cards, Visitor Research Group and Semi-Structured Interviews with curators.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis generates a conceptualisation of learning shaped by respondents and informed by the key clusters of ideas arising from the Literature Review.

In *Chapter Six: Conclusion*, the findings of my analysis form the focus for critical reflection institutionally and in relation to the substantive issues discussed in this chapter. As such I aim to provide an integrated account of theory and practice that furthers the debate about learning in museums.

iii) The Case Study Context

The Design Museum is an independent, charitable organisation located on Shad Thames, east of Tower Bridge. It was established in 1989 in a refurbished banana warehouse, under the auspices of Sir Terence Conran whose ambition to ‘do something significant for design education’ (Bayley, 2006) had given rise to the Boiler House project seven years earlier (1982-1987). The Boiler House was a temporary exhibition space at the Victoria and Albert Museum that successfully introduced contemporary design and its concomitant debates to its host institution. The history and inception of the Design Museum was considered in greater depth in my IFS (Charman, 2008). From a contemporary perspective, the Design Museum is notable for its current programming model of rolling temporary exhibitions, akin to

a European kunsthalle. This programme is dedicated to exhibiting contemporary design in all its forms, across exhibitions that span the breadth of design, encompassing industrial, fashion, architecture, product, and service, automotive, digital and graphic design.

Learning is at the core of the Design Museum's rationale. The principal activity of the museum is described in its Articles as:

to advance the education of the public in the study of all forms of contemporary design and architecture in the historical, social, artistic, industrial and commercial contexts. (Design Museum Memorandum of Association, 2009)

Today, the museum is poised at the threshold of a major development towards a new incarnation for the 21st century, having outgrown its current site. Integral to this development is the ambition to double audience numbers over the next five years, from 250,000 to 500,000 annually. Currently, temporary exhibitions form the mainstay of the museum's public provision and are the primary source of revenue, the museum receiving less than 10% of its funding from DCMS grant-in-aid.

iv) Rationale for the Research

My research has a two-fold rationale, grounded in the particularities of the practitioner doctorate, in which enquiry in a natural setting is undertaken both to inform my own professional practice and to contribute to scholarship in the relevant research field. At institutional level, the rationale is that the museum's educational provision for visitors will need to develop significantly in order to fulfil its ambitions for growth. My research proposes that a necessary component of developing educational provision is in-depth understanding of how adult visitors (the bulk of our audiences) learn through visiting exhibitions. At the level of scholarship in museum education, the rationale for my research is located in a critique of generalising tendencies concerning museum learning.

Provision for visitors can mean many different things in the museum context. It can encompass the highest standards of access for visitors physically, socially and

culturally; it can concern the operational activities of the museum in relation to staffing, opening hours, ticket prices and cloakroom facilities. My research focuses on intellectual provision as it relates to the principal activity of the Design Museum – indeed, to activity constituting one of the defining, core characteristics of the museum concept historically - that of exhibitions for the purpose of public education. My study asks, what is the character of adult learning as envisaged and enabled within exhibitions at the Design Museum? Arguably, through developing more in-depth understanding of adult learning in our exhibitions, valuable opportunities for qualitative development of this area of museum provision can be identified and visitor experience significantly enriched.

In considering further the institutional rationale for my research, the question arises of the extent to which the Design Museum captures the learning and experience of an exhibition visit from a qualitative perspective. At the time of formulating this study, audience research at the Design Museum comprised quantitative demographic reports generating socio-economic and geographical data (Audiences London, 2008/9). The question of why quantitative demographic data has been prioritised above qualitative data relating to on-site visitor experience is in large part answered in reference to the external funding policy context for museums in the UK. The last decade of the Labour administration's support for museums was a period in which cultural policy and grant-in-aid were cloaked in the forces of economic rationalism, as quantitative 'key performance indicators' based on visitor footfall comprised the main measurement of value to government (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007). A second response to the question of prioritising quantitative demographic audience data might also be located in the museum's implicit understanding that learning takes place through the experience of an exhibition visit. The qualitative perspective forged through my study will, therefore, contribute to the work of the Design Museum in making the implicit explicit, with the aim of developing educational provision for visitors and complementing existing quantitative research.

v) The Substantive Issue of the Research

The localised question of the extent to which the Design Museum captures the learning and experience of its visitors betokens a broader substantive issue in

museum education today. This issue concerns the tendency towards generalisation about learning in the museum context. Of particular relevance for my study is the paucity of research that examines in-depth the informal adult learning arising through an exhibition visit, and shaped by the specific institutional context of that visit. This I find surprising, given the recognition of the possibilities for research in this area in museum studies literature a decade ago, and the significant investment in museum education subsequently enjoyed under the Labour government.

There is little understanding of the potential of museums for life-long learning, and the powerful pedagogic role of displays and exhibitions is barely acknowledged, and seldom researched. (Hooper Greenhill, 2000:2)

In pursuing a conceptualisation of learning and exploring the extent to which this may be informed by the local context of the Design Museum, I remain mindful of the charges of elitism levelled at the modernist collection-centric museum (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Lang et al, 2006; McClellan, 2003). However, given the Design Museum's explicit commitment to public education in the fields of design and architecture, the importance of disciplinary knowledge and focus on design should not be overlooked.

Under Labour's recently ended tenure (1997-2010), the educational role of national museums enjoyed newfound attention and investment. The 1997 state-commissioned report on the country's museums, *A Common Wealth*, was used to lobby for additional funding to support museum education (as late as 1994 only 1 in 5 museums had education staff) and the first DCMS Comprehensive Spending Review put public service at the heart of what museums should do. Blair's electoral mantra at the 1996 Labour Party conference for the in-coming government was "education, education, and education", such that issues of access to museums and questions of social inclusion took centre stage, including the rubric of museum education. In May 2000, the policy document 'Centres for Social Change; Museums, Galleries and Archives for All' set an access standard for the cultural sector which some museum professionals perceived as firing a broadside into the museum as a place of scholarship and specialism. The concept of a social model of intellectual access was raised for the first time; museums should provide access for many not just for the

enlightened few; they should nurture educational opportunities; foster creative industry and most importantly, museums should be *about* collections, but *for* people (Anderson, 1997; DCMS, 2000:2005).

The intellectual access policy agenda provoked lively debate among cultural professionals. In May 2000 the Peer group, an amalgam of artists, curators, cultural commentators and philosophers, published *Art for All? Their Policies and Our Culture* (Wallinger & Warnock, 2000). In part a response to the *Museums for the Many* policy document, this publication and accompanying series of debates signalled a deep seated concern about the greater involvement of the state in shaping and emphasizing the activities and responsibilities of the art museum in relation to its publics. At the heart of this debate was a perception that an increased public-facing role for the museum would dilute those qualities of connoisseurial scholarship and collection-centred expertise which were perceived by collectives such as the Peer group as at the core of museum identity, cultural authority and curatorial professionalism. The historical tension between the museum's public and scholarly functions has been critiqued within museums studies (Bennett, 1995; McClellan, 2003) and continues to be a live issue today. At this year's Museums Association conference, a strand of talks and presentations exploring the increasing tendency for museums to engage in participatory practices such as co-curating was convened under the title 'Sack the Curator'. Intended as a provocation for debate, I found the ensuing discussions to reveal an on-going tension between the educational and curatorial functions of the public museum.

The political currency afforded the access agenda can also be situated within broader western philosophical shifts in which the modernist, enlightenment notion of the grand narrative, displayed and affirmed through the agency of the museum display, was disrupted by post-modernity's multiplicities and subsequent loss of faith in metanarratives (Jameson, 1984). From the perspective of learning in the exhibition context, such philosophical debate pivoted on the epistemological status afforded to the museum object. The experience-driven, learner-centred approach, conducive with the pluralities and decentering of authorial expertise generated through post-modernism, positions the museum artefact as subject to multiple interpretations, shaped by the visitor's personal significance and 'life worlds' through which they

construct meaning. Such an approach displaces a positivist epistemology in which the meaning of the object is understood to be fixed, existing a priori and irrespective of whatever interpretations the visitor might formulate (Hein, H. 2000:13).

With greater attention focused on the educational role of the museum, the question of how to measure learning came to the fore. In 2000 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport established a new national strategic body, initially called Resource but soon renamed the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (hereafter the MLA, recently abolished by the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government in public spending cuts). The MLA commissioned the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMS) in the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester to develop an approach to measuring the outcomes of learning in museums. Within an over-arching approach entitled 'Inspiring Learning for All' (hereafter ILFA), RCMS developed a conceptual and intellectual framework for designing research tools, analysis and interpretation. This was called the 'Generic Learning Outcomes' model (hereafter GLO) and was underpinned by socio-cultural and constructivist learning theories further explored in the Literature Review. Purportedly, this model could be universally applied to any museum learning environment or experience irrespective of museum content.

Politically, a key aim of the GLO framework was to allow the aggregation of individual learning experiences in order to advocate their value to government stakeholders. The GLOs could be applied both quantitatively and qualitatively, enabling a mix of research methods to be implemented such as questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. The model identified five generic learning outcomes as follows:

- Knowledge and Understanding
- Skills
- Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity
- Attitudes and Values Action
- Behaviour and Progression

While the GLO's are discussed as a research endeavour into museum learning (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007), their outcomes-based approach suggest that they may operate more effectively as an evaluation tool. George Hein's distinction between evaluation and research in the museum education context is useful in this regard: evaluation is a judgemental process carried out in response to a particular need, asking questions about specific outcomes or processes with no application beyond the instance. By contrast, research is carried out,

for the sake of increasing knowledge, with no particular outcome required...Questions that begin with 'I wonder if...' can be perfectly acceptable research questions. (Hein, G. 1998:57)

This distinction between evaluation and research suggests a point of critique of the GLO framework, which in being outcome focused does not allow for the unintended or unexpected learning experience. When the learning to be explored is independent and free choice, rather than taking place within the structures of a formalised activity, questions of how to measure, or understand, such learning become increasingly complex.

Pekarik critiques outcomes based approaches by arguing that measuring learning entails the imposition of preconceived outcomes against which or within which such measurement is to be made. This positions the museum as creating exhibitions that a priori set out to control and direct visitor learning in order to achieve those outcomes, affecting a paternalistic relationship between institution and visitor. If visitors come to museums to experience something new and personally meaningful, then it is possible they may resist attempts to shape this process, or alternatively any learning that happens outside of the stated and proscribed outcomes – that is, unexpected and unknown outcomes - will not be recognised. Pekarik levels a second criticism of outcomes based approaches as a tendency to reinforce dominant understanding of institutional mission, which risk limiting curatorial innovation and narrowing the potential spectrum of visitor experiences (Pekarik, 2010:107). Pontin adds a further qualification to the GLOs in her observation that their generic character may risk the marginalisation of the nuances of content, stating how “there is a danger that the results can minimize the data and much may be lost or not

visible to the reader” (Pontin in Lang et al, 2006:120).

Pekarik sets out alternatives to this approach, including ‘participant-based’ approaches to visitor studies, drawing on work in naturalistic evaluation (Wolf and Tymitz, 1978), responsive evaluation (Stake, 1984), fourth generation evaluation (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) and collaborative evaluation (Cousins, Donohue and Bloom, 1996). In essence, participant-based research looks for the unknown, seeking to develop existing understandings with new dimensions from the perspective of the research respondents. Arguably because this approach is goal-free, it can provide insights that are “more complete and contextualised, more nuanced and complex, and more accepting of multiple viewpoints.” (Pekarik, 2010:111)

When implemented within the context of research into learning in the museum exhibition, the participant-based approach has the potential to elicit insights that can feed in to the development of future exhibitions, affording a deeper understanding of how and why learning has happened. It is within the realm of participant-based approaches to understanding learning in the museum exhibition context that my study is situated, as discussed in Chapter 1: Designing the Research.

Informed by the findings of my IFS, I make a further critique of the GLO framework with regard to its universal character. While on the one hand it is an enabling device that allows for the application of the framework across the richly heterogeneous field of museums, there is a concomitant danger that in framing museum learning as a process with generic outcomes, the potential for any distinctive characteristics of museum learning is subsumed, naturalised or marginalised, and the museum exhibition is misrepresented as a neutral environment, an issue which I consider further in Chapter Four.

This generalising tendency towards museum learning has been further articulated more recently within the catch-all umbrella concept of ‘cultural learning’. The Cultural Learning Alliance (hereafter CLA), established in 2009 to run a one year advocacy campaign, applies the notion of cultural learning to advocate to government for all forms of learning through cultural experiences that take place both in the cultural sector and in schools. Cultural learning is loosely described as:

enjoying music, seeing live performance, visiting museums and galleries, being inspired by heritage and architecture, making art with writers, performers and artists. (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2010)

Another articulation of cultural learning ascribes it institutional characteristics alongside the subject focus put forward by the CLA. Defining culture under the framework of responsibilities for the DCMS, Cutler describes cultural learning as those forms of learning that take place “beyond the classroom or lecture theatre, within a cultural setting, and that takes cultural product as its subject matter for direct engagement” (Cutler, 2010).

This notion of cultural learning emphatically differentiates the informal learning environment of the museum from that of the classroom. Key within Cutler’s definition is an acknowledgement of the particularity of the site for cultural learning: the formal environment of the school or university is distinct from that of the museum. Whereas the differentiation between learning in schools and learning in museums is well-rehearsed in the literature on learning in the museum (Hein: 1998, Hooper-Greenhill: 1994, 1999; Black 2005; Lang et al, 2006) the term ‘cultural learning’ to encompass museum learning is relatively new, and as such, deserves further consideration.

When used for advocacy purposes the notion of cultural learning carries the potential to unite a rich variety of learning experiences within the common aim of strengthening the role and profile of the arts and heritage in formal education, ultimately aiming to embed them in formal curricula and in the lives of learners. However, in the critical realist vein, I am wary of global catch all terms such as ‘cultural learning’, and suggest that they benefit from being approached with a degree of caution. Learning is a hugely complex process that has been subject to a plethora of definitions and understandings. Furthermore, museums comprise a widely and richly heterogeneous field of difference, with distinct histories, disciplines, traditions and structures. As such, the universal term ‘cultural learning’ is perhaps best approached as a heuristic device for further refinement according to the particularities of the context for learning.

This is not to deny the value of the GLO framework for evaluating learning, nor of the umbrella term of ‘cultural learning’ as an advocacy tool. However, I believe there is fertile territory to be explored by digging beneath the generic surface and moving from evaluation to research, investigating the extent to which as yet unknown facets of free-choice, independent, adult learning might be shaped by an institution’s ‘typological specificity’. The notion of typological specificity is developed by Hilde Hein in relation to the content and taxonomic systems manifest within family groupings of museums such as the Art Museum, Science Museum and Natural History Museum (Hein, H. 2000:17). It is a fertile notion for my research, especially given the findings of my IFS which identified an embedded relationship between the museum’s workshop pedagogies and design thinking (Charman, 2008). An anecdotal example lends some heat to my research endeavour. At a recent conference at Tate Britain entitled ‘Interpretation, Theory and Encounter’ in July this year, Tony Bennett (a leading sociologist in museum studies), posed the question as to whether there might be distinctive dimensions to looking in the art museum. Donald Preziosi, conference keynote (and another leading light in museum studies, from the field of art history) furnished the reply that one might well surmise this to be the case, but that further research would be needed to establish whether a museum’s collection and curatorial strategies might inform certain ways of looking in a localised exhibition environment. Scholarship in this regard largely focuses on the character of looking in the art gallery and art museum (Bal, 1996; Bennett, 1995; Illeris, 2009). While Pringle differentiates between the character of learning in the art gallery as opposed to museums (Pringle, 2006:7), a generalisation is nevertheless implied regarding learning in all other types of museums. Given the heterogeneity of the museum landscape, the extent to which a museum’s typological specificity might inform the dimensions of looking in the exhibition is an area ripe for research. This question is the crux of my thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW - KEY CONTEXTS FOR THE STUDY

This chapter sets out the key contexts for my research as follows:

- i) Institutional Contexts: Education and the Museum Concept**
- ii) Disciplinary Contexts: Understanding Design**
- iii) Theoretical Contexts: Learning and Visitor Studies**

The institutional context is explored through perspectives on the educational role of the museum and exhibition as an environment for learning. Next, the disciplinary focus of the Design Museum as the case study organisation entails a review of arguments for the historical emergence of design as a discreet academic discipline through history, theory and practice. The third key context for the study focuses on the theoretical landscape of Visitor Studies and learning in the museum. Each of these contexts gives rise to a cluster of perspectives and ideas which guide my data analysis in Chapter Five.

i) Institutional Contexts: Education and the Museum Concept

Literature in museum studies identifies the current moment as a period of significant transition for the museum as an institutional concept. American philosopher Hilde Hein describes this as a conceptual revolution in which museums are changing to adapt to new ideas, new technologies and epistemologies, new generations of people, and newly warranted museum objects (Hein, H. 2000: viii). For other museum scholars the museum has always been in a state of flux, and change is the constant. The museum is continually configuring and reconfiguring itself both in response to, and as a way of shaping the world (Knell et al, 2007). This is not to deny the current moment as one of profound change for the museum concept. In the last decade museums have come under a confluence of pressures that have rendered their institutional identities increasingly hybrid and multi-faceted, in contrast to an earlier conception of the museum perceived as a one-dimensional uncontested site for the display of 'Culture' to an educated elite (Lang, Reeve & Woollard, 2006). These pressures relate to the acknowledgement and experience of diverse audiences;

of telling several cultural narratives and not just a single meta-narrative; of relationship to community and most pressingly, of economic viability in an increasingly competitive and shrinking market. Today the museum concept is radically syncretic and heterogeneous.

Amidst the diversity of the museum concept however, common ground can be found in the educational role of the museum and exhibitions as environments for learning. The educational role of the museum is part of its historical and institutional ‘DNA’, which can be traced back to the inception of the oldest surviving public museum in the world, the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford in 1683. This institution originally housed the Ashmole collection of scientific instruments and was structured over three floors, comprising classroom, collection display and laboratory. Thus the museum was fundamentally concerned with active enquiry: teaching and learning for academic purposes were as much a part of its role as curating displays for the visiting public. Similarly, Europe’s first post-revolutionary public art museum, the Louvre in Paris, opened in 1789 to a clarion call that the new museum be fiercely democratic in intent: education and enlightenment were no longer on offer to the privileged few, but to the many. This point was emphatically made by the painter Jean-Jacques David at the opening of the Louvre:

The museum is not supposed to be a vain assemblage of frivolous luxury objects that serve only to satisfy idle curiosity. What it must be is an imposing school. (McClellan, 1994:108)

Museum theorists provide different perspectives on the genealogy and educational role of the museum in the west. Tony Bennett offers a sociological genealogy by tracing the interconnections between the museum, the amusement park, the international exposition and the department store (Bennett, 1995:2005). Perhaps a more commonly received genealogy is that which commences with the Renaissance ‘Wunderkammers’, those cabinets of curiosity assembled to reflect the natural and manmade world and to inspire awe and wonder in those fortunate enough to be invited to view their contents (Impey & MacGregor, 1985).

The museum was designed as the most complete response to the crisis of knowledge provoked by the expansion of the natural world through the

voyages of discovery and exploration ... and the explosion of information about the world in general. (Findlen, P. 1989:68)

During the 18th century's period of Enlightenment in Europe, taxonomy and classification of museum artefacts came to the fore and the eccentricity and ludic character of the wunderkammer was largely forsaken in the service of an educational approach described as learning at a glance (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007:190). Inspired by Linnaean principles of classifying plants and animals by genus and class (McClellan, 1994:80), the grouping and display of exhibits through classificatory methods (for example in the art museum by school and chronology) was to remain the dominant display strategy until the mid to late twentieth century, when, for example, major international art museums such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Tate Modern experimented with thematic approaches to displaying their collections. However, it is the former taxonomic model that informs Hilde Hein's notion of the 'typological specificity' of family groupings of museums and arguably this still finds relevance today.

Nineteenth century Europe saw the construction of museums in many of the western world's major capital cities, in which the neoclassical museum was conceived as an institutional expression of the inter-relationship between the cultural, artistic and political life of the city, uniting municipal power with culture and the nation state (Marlotta, op.cit). Taxonomic display methods dominated ethnographic collections from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century. The Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford arranged artefacts appropriated from colonized peoples to convey a form of social Darwinism, the message that change came slowly as result of gradual evolution from simple to complex, denoting so-called primitive to advanced European standards of civilisation (Pitt Rivers writing in 1891:115 in Bennett in Hooper-Greenhill, 1999). Fundamental to such display arrangements was a belief that the visitor would learn the lesson of evolutionary progress through understanding the rationale for ordering and classification (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999:241).

The didactic intent of civic museums was pronounced in the nineteenth century, perhaps most explicitly in the example of the South Kensington Museum (which

was to become the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1899) and its origin in the movements in support of the expansion of education in Britain. The V&A was a state-funded pioneering attempt at vocational education driven by the recognition that the manufacturing population needed training in design practice and production to compete internationally. Political arguments began to be made that the cultivation of the arts could be commercially beneficial, rather than just civilising, especially for the new urban proletariat. Yet a wholesale conception of the museum as educational was vigorously debated by Ruskin. Writing in the 1850s, he starkly differentiated between educational museums for the 'lower orders' and civic, national galleries of art offering a higher order of contemplative, elevated experience and respite from the exigencies of a nation overly immersed in trade:

A national museum is one thing, a national place of education another; and the more sternly and unequivocally they are separated the better each will perform its office – the one of treasuring, the other of teaching. (Ruskin in Taylor, 1999:78)

Through the initial and founding presentation of its collection primarily for instructional purposes, the South Kensington Museum was considered by Ruskin to occupy cultural status inferior to that of the National Gallery of Art, reflecting the lower status of the decorative arts in relation to fine art, a distinction that goes back to the Renaissance (Shiner, 2001).

The early twentieth century, fraught with social conflict and the explosion of modernism's rule-breaking avant-garde, saw the very existence of the museum questioned, most violently in Marinetti's condemnation of museums as "cemeteries of empty exertion, Cavalries of crucified dreams, registries of aborted beginnings!" (Huxley & Witts, 1996:252). The perception of the museum as mausoleum was to linger in the twentieth century, exemplified later in Adorno's acerbic observation on the semantic relationship between the words 'museum' and 'mauseal' as expressive of the museum's deracinating effect of removing artefacts both from their originated culture and to the present moment through the act of display:

Museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art. They testify to the neutralisation of culture. (Adorno Farago & Preziosi, 2003:51-65)

The museum concept was rendered increasingly fragile by significant developments in art practice as well as by the wider national and socio-cultural contexts.

Duchamp's witty recontextualisation of everyday objects, such as 'Fountain' (1919), from their commonplace context to the art museum weakened the idea of the exhibited object's inherent authenticity, content and didactic potential. For some museum theorists, the twentieth century was witness to a new museum philosophy in which the work no longer existed as singular and autonomous but required framing by the museum and by viewers in order to become meaningful. Within this new museum philosophy, the visitor becomes "an active participant who is capable of making judgements" rendering the museum as a "relational space and no longer as one suited to the interpretation of individual works" (Marlotta, 2010:11).

For others the art museum in particular found its apotheosis in modernism's white cube gallery environment (O'Doherty, 1976), in which everything but the art work itself is expunged in order to provide an unadulterated pure visual engagement with the work of art:

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all clues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art'. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. (O'Doherty, 1976:14)

From the 1960s onwards, a further significant change took place in the museum concept which was to directly inform its educational role. Manifest initially through developments in exhibition design, the change was as much conceptual as practical. An increasing focus on audience development resulted in a concurrent emphasis on the museum as actively educational, in some ways returning the museum concept to its historic core role in the Ashmole Museum of Science and Industry.

Today, learning through audience engagement is increasingly understood to be at the core of the museum's purpose, but the on-site laboratory and classroom of old is supplemented by social media and digital technologies such as social media

networks, mobile devices, the internet and multi-media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Activities such as creative collaboration, crowdsourcing and co-curating similarly position the museum as actively seeking out and embracing its audiences both as exercises in audience development and in response to changing dimensions of creative practice (Cooke in Marincola, 2007).

Marstine (2006) offers four museum metaphors to highlight key characteristics of the contemporary museum concept as it emerges across this museum genealogy:

- *Museum as shrine* – a retreat from the outside world which offers the visitor an authentic experience of cultural artefacts endorsed by the perceived authority, connoisseurship and expertise of the institution.
- *Museum as market-driven industry* – a commercial and consumer oriented institution which exploits its economic potential through programmes and displays that enable the museum to capitalise on corporate sponsorship, charitable foundations, state subsidy and the museum's own revenue raising activity such as retail and refreshment.
- *Museum as colonising space* – a classificatory environment that defines peoples and cultures through the appropriation of artefacts from non-western cultures and is blind to the imperialist histories that inform its collections, programmes and displays.
- *Museum as post museum* – the self-aware institution, fully cognizant and open about its driving interests, agendas, strategies, decision-making processes and the concomitant politics of representation, proactively engaging its audiences and staff in core activities.

Of these four metaphors, the post museum sees education as most fully integrated into museum practice (Marstine, 2006:30). In this scenario, education is not the transmission of knowledge derived from display taxonomies, but instead, is an actively generated and enabled participatory process in which audiences become

dynamic participants in museum discourse with the goal of promoting social understanding (Huysen 1994). Hooper-Greenhill argues that the post-museum will extend to informal visitors those models of enactive and embodied learning more commonly offered to formal learners, thereby counterbalancing the current emphasis in the museum on “learning earning at a glance”, a visual mode of engagement predicated on the viewer’s ability to understand both the organising principles of a display – that of chronology and schools - and thereby to understand its subject matter (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007:190). Other museum theorists adopt a more positive approach to learning through looking, and present the exhibition as actively enabling learning through visual spectacle and display strategies (Bal, 1996; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998).

While to the pedagogue and educator, Hooper-Greenhill’s vision of enactive and embodied learning for all museum visitors may appear deeply compelling, the dominant mode of visitor engagement and learning when visiting an exhibition nevertheless remains the act of looking. Writing in the field of visual culture, Bal’s theory of expository agency (Bal, 1996) offers a model for understanding the museum exhibition as actively enabling learning by looking. In this theory, all visitors are understood as learners insofar as learning arises from looking in an exhibition context which is neither neutral nor passive but instead is enabled across differentiated power relations. Looking is described as a threefold process of interaction between the viewer/visitor, the art work and the gallery context. It is a process that involves the viewer in a relationship of power and dominance. Drawing on work by French linguist Emile Benveniste (1971), Bal identifies three actors involved in the act of looking at art; the first person doing the ‘speaking’ (characterised as the ‘expository agency’ of the exhibition), the second person being those who are spoken to (the visitor/learner) and the third person being the subject under discussion (the art work). The notion of the expository agency of the exhibition in respect of interpretation and display practices includes “constative language use, visual pointing (display in the narrow sense), alleging examples, laying out arguments on the basis of narratives, mapping and laying bare” (Bal 1996:8).

Crucial to the notion of expository agency is its operation as a naturalised and universal process, which produces seemingly self-evident truths or narratives about exhibits. That is, the partiality and selectivity of curatorial decisions concerning installation display and interpretation are rendered invisible so as to produce particular modes of looking at art, modes which are described as pure, contemplative and aesthetic (Bal, op.cit.). While Bal's theory of expository agency is purely theoretical, it is nonetheless valuable in calling attention to how the exhibition environment actively positions the viewer so as to effect meaning-making strategies. Coupled with Hooper-Greenhill and Marstine's metaphor of the post-museum, the notion of the **Active Museum** emerges as a key idea informing theories about the educational role of the museum.

ii) Disciplinary Contexts: Understanding Design

In this section I review literature charting the formation of design as a discreet cultural category through the emergence of design across design history, design studies and design culture, and in relation to distinguishing dimensions of design as practice.

Distinguishing design from related academic disciplines and professions, especially fine art, is not without its complexities and counter-arguments. Most pertinently, with regard to the case study context of the Design Museum, design has a deeply ambiguous relationship to fine art. Boundaries are blurred and there is little consensus and much contestation about the distinctiveness of each discipline in relation to the other. However, design and art are not alone in this contestation. Mieke Bal's critical notes in 'The Discourse of the Museum' consider the arbitrariness of disciplinary boundaries, and the subsequent responsibility of the museum to exercise criticality towards its operations as a site of knowledge, one that discursively produces and defines such boundaries (Bal in Greenberg et al, 1996:201). Nowhere is this more explicitly apparent than in the commercial world of the art market where a hybrid known as 'design art' is growing as a principal force (although whether this is about design acquiring a newfound cultural currency or solely to do with commercial gain is a matter for debate beyond the focus of this thesis). While art and design have jostled one another over the centuries, the emergence of hybrid design practices into the physical and conceptual space of visual art both through exhibitions and critical discourse merits mention, given the focus of this study on the exhibition context for contemporary design at the Design Museum. On the one hand 'Design Art', exemplified in Marc Newson's *Lockheed Lounge* 1986, a work that was the first of this category to sell in excess of one million dollars, is steadily gaining commercial recognition in the art gallery context. On the other hand, 'Critical Design' such as the work of Dunne and Raby, or Kennard Phillips, is defining itself as a form of design practice using languages of reflexivity and self-awareness more traditionally associated with modern and contemporary visual art. Seemingly, the relationship between art and design in the exhibition context is both contested and on-going.

While by no means the only way to address the breadth of writing about design, this section locates design within three broad taxonomies which single out the disciplines of Design History, Design Culture and Design Studies as ways to understand how design has emerged historically as a subject in its own right.

Broadly speaking, Design History tends to treat design as single objects and focus on the impact of creative individuals (Conway, 1995; McDermott, 2005; Naylor, 1990 [1971]; Pevsner, 2005 [1936]; Sparke 2008 [1986], Walker, 1989). Design Culture considers the impact of design as part of wider social interactions (Julier, 2008; Highmore, 2009) and Design Studies seeks to understand what it is that sets design as an activity apart from all other pursuits (Buchanan and Margolin, 1995; Cross, 1995; Shiner, 2001). Each of these perspectives offers valuable background into the dominant modes of thinking about design.

The development of Design History as an academic subject in its own right marks a key moment in the explicit recognition of design as a distinct discipline in the twentieth century. McDermott (2005) describes the formalisation of Design History through a series of significant contributions both by individuals committed to the subject – in particular Sigfried Gideon (1888-1964), Nikolaus Pevsner (1902-83) and Herbert Read (1893-1968) - and as a result of momentous changes in British art and design education in the 1960s and 70s. Within the family of academic subjects offered at degree level, design history remains a relative newcomer even today. The inception of the Design History Society in Britain in 1977 and the launch of the Open University's course on the history of modern architecture and design 1890 - 1939 are noteworthy for setting design history apart from the history of decorative or applied arts, two subjects within which design history had been previously subsumed. However, presenting design history through the work of a small number of significant individuals is an approach that finds its critics, for example when considered from the perspective of feminist theory. Attfield critiques the provenance of design history through the Modern Movement as one that privileges a concept of design as the product solely of professional designers, industrial production and division of labour within which women's contribution is absent, rendered silent, hidden and unformulated (Attfield, 2007:71). Although aspects of design could be studied as ancillary to art and architecture at degree level, it was not

until the Coldstream Report of 1961 and its recommendation that the existing diploma qualification for a designer be upgraded to a degree, one fifth of which was to comprise historical or contextual studies, that design history found its feet as a discreet field of study and entered the academy.

The relationship between design history and design practice at degree level is not without its own particular set of tensions (Russell, 2002; Wood, 2000). These continue to be debated today and are of direct import to the display of design in the gallery context, for example in relation to framing design both as idea/process (creative, generative, iterative and commutative) and as object (aesthetic, formal, autonomous). The question of the credibility and status of studio practice in relation to academic research lies at the heart of the debate, concerning the extent to which the practice of design is required to demonstrate sound intellectual foundations, through design history, a subject for which pedagogical methods have set it apart from those of the design studio. Design history at degree level has predominantly adopted the methods of art history, these being the lecture and seminar format, in which critical analysis of the design object occurs through a process of dismembering the elements, from an objective and detached point of view, looking at its essential elements, comparing and contrasting (Raïen, 2003:1). In this process, the creative and experiential characteristics of the design process are overlooked in favour of analytical and reflective approaches to the design object presented as text, deracinated from the processes of conception, production and manufacture. The advantages of embedding design history within design practice degrees are largely understood to lie in the provision of a substantial curriculum underpinned by academic research with strong links to museums and galleries and alignment with professional activities (QAAHE, 2002:2.4). While pedagogical methods for both design practice and design history continue to develop apace, the literature suggests that their differences are yet to be fully reconciled to the satisfaction of practitioners and academics.

As Coldstream's recommendations were implemented, design courses expanded and design history proliferated across different fields of design, giving rise to subject histories for fashion, industrial/product design and graphics. The focus was on design after the Industrial Revolution and conceived of as arising through the twin

processes of industrialization and modernization (Heskett, 1981). Such a focus was not to everyone's liking as it was perceived to be blinkered to the importance of establishing deeper historical co-ordinates for the emergence of design. A vociferous dissenting voice is found in the work of furniture historian Simon Jervis, former curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum and controversial editor of the *Penguin Dictionary of Design and Designers* (1984). Jervis's criticism of locating the origins of design in the Industrial Revolution revolved around the extent to which this position both exuded an anti-ornament sensibility whilst excluding the emergence of design throughout the period 1450 - 1800 (McDermott, 2005:81, Walker, 1989:24). Oxford University's *Journal of Design History* further promoted the cause of design history as an academic subject in its own right. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the intellectual base of the subject became increasingly multi-disciplinary, drawing on analytical methods from sociology, anthropology, geography and political economy and conversant with new histories of design such as Women's Studies and material culture. Alongside expanded readings of Design History examining the role of design in society, the growing interest in design as an interdisciplinary field has given rise to a nascent new area of study, that of Design Culture (Forty, 1992).

Design Culture as a specific form of scholarly enquiry readily acknowledges its roots within design history and material culture. Just as readily, it critiques these subjects for what are regarded as significant shortfalls. The emphasis of design history on design objects as the output of key individuals and the concurrent attention levied to style and formal qualities over process or social impact has been criticized for overlooking the experience of everyday design (Julier, 2008; Highmore, 2009). While Material Culture (including the forms, uses, and meanings of objects, images, and environments in everyday life) has to some extent redressed this imbalance through focusing on how consumers read and understand products, the significance of objects in the diurnal lives of people is largely located in the domestic context in which the individuated consumer is privileged. Design Culture negotiates between design history and material culture, exploring the range of human experiences (for example, social, cultural, political, or economic) implicated and produced through networks of designers and design objects and their intermediaries and consumers (Molotch, 2003). The notion of the network –

manifest through the structuring of systems and relationships between people and artifacts – is central to Design Culture and is perhaps its most ambitious characteristic:

It extends design studies beyond the realm of goods (the products of industrial designers, fashion designers, architects and so on) and into the whole panoply of interconnections between the material and the immaterial, between humans and things, between the organic and the inorganic. (Highmore, 2009: xiv)

The relevance of Design Culture to understanding learning in the temporary exhibition context at the Design Museum is twofold. Primarily, its value is located in the explicit recognition of the rich interconnections between humans and things, for this is where meanings are formed and knowledge is generated. Secondly, the commitment of Design Culture to an understanding of design as a contingent, process-based anonymous practice that continuously patterns and shapes the world is cognizant with the Design Museum's mission to inculcate appreciation of and for design in all walks of life, from the most spectacular and complex (for example in 2008 an exhibition focusing on Zaha Hadid's dramatic architectural practice) to the most modest and unassuming (for example, in the same year, an exhibition of Sam Hecht's 'Under a Fiver' design collection).

Design Culture is not alone in its privileging of design-as-process. It complements recent developments in Design Studies (also known as Design Thinking) that research and describe what it is that sets the productive process of design apart from other disciplines. Proponents situate the emergence of design as a systematic discipline with principles and methods positioned as distinct from other related fields of knowledge (Buchanan and Margolin, 1995; Cross, 1995).

Two features of Design Studies/Thinking are of particular value for this study. Buchanan charts the cultural trajectory of the emergence of design as a discrete discipline from its roots in Aristotle's *Poetics* to the present day (Buchanan and Margolin, 1995: 23-69). Most notably for this study, given its focus on the display of design objects in the gallery context, Buchanan's account of design thinking finds its reification in the surface appearance, or aesthetics, of design, referred to as the

‘expressive styling’ of the object: “expression does not clothe design thinking: it *is* design thinking in its most immediate manifestation” (Buchanan and Margolin, 1995: 46).

The display of design objects in the gallery context, in which the emphasis for visitor engagement has historically been on the visual process of looking at and reading the formal qualities of the displayed object (Bal, 1996; Staniszewski, 1995) renders significant Buchanan’s proposition that the stylistic, formal expressive qualities of the design object are design thinking made manifest. The second feature concerns the influence of social, institutional and intellectual changes on the formation of the discipline of design, in which the museum plays an active role.

Design Thinking flourished in the twentieth century through a small but hugely significant number of institutions dedicated to design education, commencing with the establishment of the German Werkbund in 1907 and continuing in the Bauhaus School of Design in Weimer, Germany (1919-1933), under the direction of Walter Gropius and thence to the New Bauhaus and to Ulm (Buchanan, 1995:35-38, McDermott, 2007). The roots of the Bauhaus can be traced to the inception of the Munich Werkbund, a state-sponsored alliance of designers, architects, artists and industrialists concerned to improve German competitiveness internationally through uniting art and industry (Schwartz, 1996). The drive towards such philosophical and practical cohesion between the primacy of functional efficiency on the part of industry, and artistic expression on behalf of the arts, was to find expression through the Modern Movement in architecture and design of 1923 – 1932 (Benton, Benton and Sharp, 1975:112).

However, the Bauhaus School of Design did not entirely adhere to this fusion but kept the complex issue alive as a matter for debate, demonstrated by the differing views held between Walter Gropius, and his founder member and colleague Hannes Meyer, over the role of the artist in society. For Gropius, the artist deserved some degree of isolation from the social and economic exigencies of everyday life in order to maintain the freedom necessary to work creatively, whereas Meyer’s view was that the artist should forge as close a relationship with the external, outside world as was possible:

Do we want to be guided by the requirements of the world around us, do we want to help in the shaping of new forms of life, or do we want to be an island which [promotes the development of the individual] but whose positive productivity, [on the other hand], is questionable? (Meyer, 1928 in Benton, Benton and Sharp, 1975:168)

This is not to underestimate Gropius' formative and seminal contribution to the Bauhaus' holistic conception of design as a new liberal art, humanistic in orientation and concerned to forge both philosophical and practical connections between design and making. Rather, it is to acknowledge that the complexities and difficulties of the relationship between art, design and industry cannot be overlooked in any discussion of the emergence of the category of design. In developing the curricula for his school of design, in which students followed a broadly based foundation year followed by craft specialisations (an approach which continues to inform design education today) Gropius dealt not in binaries nor in dichotomies, instead seeking the broad co-ordinating mind, not the narrow specialist for a new liberal art of design education (Gropius, 1923 in Benton, Benton and Sharp, 1975:124).

Pedagogy at the Bauhaus was informed by an ethos of pluralistic experimentation and exploration, underpinned by the belief in the essential freedom of individual human character in a society and culture deeply influenced and affected by industrialisation.

Our ambition was to rouse the creative artist from his other-worldliness and to re-integrate him into the workaday world of realities and at the same time, to broaden and humanize the rigid, almost exclusively material mind of the businessman. (Gropius, 1962:20)

The establishment of the independent Ulm School of Design in Germany in 1953, with its political agenda opposed to facism under first Max Bill and then most influentially, Tomas Maldonado, signalled a radical disjuncture with the Bauhuas's unifying conception of design. For Maldonado, industry *was* culture and the ambitious purpose of Ulm was to find "a solid methodological basis for the work of design" rather than, as Maldonado somewhat disparagingly stated, merely forming men who were able to create and express themselves. (Frampton, 1974:5 in Buchanan, 1995:40). Such a methodology was concerned to emphasize that design was not about individual expression, but rather, could be understood through the

introduction of empirical scientific methods and techniques. Ulm is famous for its purist, rigorous approach to industrial design and for its extension of the curricula for design education to include anthropology, semiotics and psychology. Its influence was widespread and of enduring consequence for British design education. In 1965 L.B. Archer's book *Systematic Method for Designers* brought the Ulm approach to London's Royal College of Art (McDermott, 2007:226). However, Ulm was not without its critics and throughout its life was beset with internal divisions and funding difficulties, bringing about its closure in 1968.

The question of the extent to which Design Thinking can be regarded as a discreet discipline continues to be of on-going concern to scholars and practitioners of design today (Norman, 2010). While pluralistic in nature, a common thread in Design Thinking revolves around the specific characteristic of design being distinguished by 'abductive' thought, that is, the concern not with how things are but with how they *might* be – the essence of design's problem solving approach.

The significance of reviewing the disciplinary contexts of design for my study resides in the notion of design as a distinctive discipline. Design is revealed as actively and continuously under formation by individuals and institutions in relation to other fields of knowledge and to its discreet history. Such disciplinary specificity gives rise to the notion of the **Distinctive Museum** as a key idea informing the relationship between museums and their collections.

iii) Theoretical Contexts: Learning and Visitor Studies

A core characteristic of the museum in transition is a shift in focus from an inwardly focused, collection-centric institution to one that is increasingly visitor-engaged and public-facing. This shift is manifest in, for example, new modes of thematic collection display which dismantle a perceived singular authority of the grand collection narrative to offer a variety of more accessible and inclusive ways in to understanding (Lang, Reeve and Woollard: 2006), or new approaches to interpretation that enable the generation and production of cultural meanings from the perspective of the individual visitor (Black: 2005, Simon, 2010). Such approaches are positioned as a challenge to the modernist museum project, attributed an emphasis on one way transmission of factual information arising from specialist knowledge and curatorial focus to a museum visitor viewed as an 'empty vessel' to be filled with such knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 135). In respect of learning in the museum, one of the structural indicators of this shift is a commensurate change in nomenclature within many organisations, manifest as Education Departments are variously renamed Learning, or Learning and Interpretation, or Participation, or even (and most controversially, given its emphasis on education as a function of marketing) Audience Development.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to consider the arguments for and against such nomenclatures, differentiating 'learning' from 'education' in the museum context demands further consideration, given that my study takes learning as its key underpinning concept. The MLA's definition presents learning in the museum as a process of transformation engendered by a museum visit:

Learning is a process of active engagement with experience. It is what people do when they want to make sense of the world. It may involve the developing or deepening of skills, knowledge, understanding, awareness, values, ideas and feelings, or an increase in the capacity to reflect. Effective learning leads to change, development and the desire to learn more. (MLA, 2004:1)

In this regard, learning can be distinguished from the concept of 'education'. While I acknowledge that there are a rich variety of philosophical readings of the concept of education (Pring, 2000:17), for the purposes of my study I take a traditional view

of education, to denote structured and organised pedagogic activities revolving around the acquisition of proscribed content knowledge, skills or understanding within a formal curricula (Pekarik, 2010:109). Such traditional notions of education have been further differentiated from learning in museums by pointing to other distinguishing factors such as systems of assessment and timetables. In comparison, learning in museums is characterised as being learner-centred and open-ended in relation to outcomes (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007: 4). Crucially, learning can affect identity-formation as part of the process of transformation, a journey of personal growth that may be emotional or spiritual as well as intellectual. In this regard it is perhaps closer to the liberation pedagogy of bell hooks' theory of education as the practice of freedom, deeply connected to the affective world of emotions and feelings (hooks, 1994). In theorising learning, it is helpful to avoid imposing a false dualism between cognitive intellectual understanding, objectively ascribed to the faculty of mind/knowledge, and affective cognitive understanding, concerned with the more subjective character of learning and ascribed to the faculties of feeling/emotion (Reid, 1986). The objective view of learning is deeply rooted in western culture. Its intellectual lineage stems from the Platonic elevation of Reason (particularly mathematical reason) over sensory understanding and the arts, neither of which were recognised as constituting knowledge. Descartes continued the rationalist vein, conceiving of the mind as 'thinking substance' (Jones, Cardinal & Hayward 2005) thereby furthering a conceptual separation between the intellectual and the affective.

It is possible however, and certainly useful for the purposes of my study, to understand learning as bringing together both the intellectual and affective faculties as modes of cognition. Both are concerned with ways of knowing and understanding, however differently their emphases are placed. This is particularly pertinent when the environment in which learning is to be explored is that of the design exhibition, in relation to the aesthetics of the material culture. Aesthetics in this context is less about taste and more about an emotional engagement with the works on display and the display environment itself. It is an aesthetics which is "primarily concerned with material experiences, with the way the sensual world greets the sensorial body and with the affective forces that are generated in such meetings" (Highmore, 2009:10).

Potentially, such ‘affective forces’ can inculcate a process of change ascribed to learning. Wenger describes transformatory learning as a “process of becoming” (Wenger, 1998:215). Importantly for this study, focusing as it does on conceptualising learning in the specific environment of the temporary exhibition, such learning entails both a process and a place (Wenger, op.cit). The physical, spatial, sensory environment in which learning happens cannot therefore be neutralised or naturalised, because it actively contributes to the process of learning. Hence the need for a rigorous understanding of the context of the design exhibition as an environment for learning as a starting point for further exploration within the specific case.

The broad definition of museum learning put forward by the Campaign for Learning serves as a useful umbrella definition of the concept. However, as proposed in the Introduction, localised refinement of this definition offers the potential that museums might become more theoretically informed and reflective within their own distinctive contexts - and thereby able to enhance the exhibition as an environment for learning, and strengthen museum mission. In my IFS I reviewed those education theorists and psychologists whose work usefully informs qualitative educational research in the museum (Piaget, 1985; Gardner, 1983:1992; Vygotsky, 1978; Kolb in Moon, 2004; Ausubel, 1978) (Appendix A). While diverse in approach and historical moment, the theories discussed in my IFS demonstrated an expanded definition of learning which places the learner rather than the content of the learning at the centre. This definition is equally pertinent for my thesis, in that it relates not only to new understandings of the cognitive, affective and social processes of learning, but also to a broader view of sites for learning. The work of psychologist Bruner is apposite in this regard. Bruner called for a ‘cultural psychology’ of learning in which the historical background of the learner and their cultural context, coupled with the contemporary forces of a culture, were given weight as important factors shaping learning (Bruner, 1986). Learning is seen as a function of culture-at-large, and culture-at-large includes the museum as an environment for learning. It is this environment which has been the focus of manifold studies of museum audiences under the rubric of the professional field of Visitor Studies.

For some museum professionals, the relationship between learning and visitor studies operates at the level of institutional survival:

Our mission is to educate. We cannot do that if we are not serving visitors. We cannot survive if we are not assessing and satisfying the needs of our constituents. (Hill in Pitman, 1991:12)

Despite the avowed (and widely acknowledged) importance of visitor studies as a research tool for better serving museum visitors (Black, 2005; Falk & Dierking, 1992; Hooper Greenhill, 1994), its emergence as a professional field of practice in the United Kingdom is relatively recent. The national Visitor Studies Group (hereafter VSG), a professional membership organisation that runs an annual conference, advocates for, and publishes evaluation and research in museum visitor studies in the United Kingdom, was established as late as 1998. In part, the inception of the VSG can be viewed as an organisational manifestation of the changing relationship between the museum and its visitors which shapes the museum in transition. It also results from the call to museums to account for their performance and compete over potential audiences:

The rise in the ‘science’ of understanding visitors has grown in line with the need to match visitors’ expectations with improved services and exhibitions. (Lang, Reeve, Woollard, 2006: 4)

The nomenclature of visitor studies is itself notable from an etymologic perspective. The Oxford English Dictionary includes the social element as part of a visit, recalling Vygotskian psychology with its emphasis on the social nature of learning. The dictionary definition also includes a tourist element from the Latin ‘visore’, meaning ‘a view’. Thus, while the museum visitor not only takes in the visual spectacle of the museum, the notion of the view is also applicable to the opinions formed by visitors about their visit.

At the outset it is important to distinguish between evaluation and research in the field of visitor studies. Hein differentiates the two endeavours by characterising evaluation as an enterprise which seeks to find out about specific processes or outcomes, whereas research is undertaken for the sake of increasing knowledge with

no proscribed outcome (Hein, 1998/2002:56). Miles (1993) further distinguishes evaluation from research by ascribing to the former a practical, problem-solving remit under a guiding principal of pragmatism (Miles, 1993 in Hein, 1998/2002:57). Visitor Studies research has its roots in evaluative projects such as the pioneering project at the Natural History Museum in the 1970s. The aim of the study was to directly inform the museum's long-term plans for the development of their permanent galleries. These galleries were to be educational in approach with the focus on development, organisation and delivery of materials (rather than on the needs of the visitor-as-learner). The project was an evaluation because it set out to identify evidence of learning within explicitly stated exhibition objectives and quantifiable targets (Miles, 1986, 1988; Miles and Tout, 1991 in Hooper-Greenhill, 1994:71-2). In the decades since this early study, greater attention has been given in visitor studies evaluation to the needs and responses of visitors, taking in the multifarious motivations and interests of visitors. Of particular note is the extent to which such studies have demonstrated the importance of social aspects of the museum visit (McManus, 1987). My study is located within a commensurate shift in visitor studies from evaluation towards research which adopts a more open-ended and naturalistic approach, seeking not to analyse and explain but to understand.

The literature on Visitor Studies offers a broad and rich range of perspectives on visitor motivations, experiences and the perceived benefits of a museum visit that complement research into learning in the museum environment. Hood (1983) and Perry (1992) identify a range of factors that influence visitors' decisions to visit a museum, including characteristics of successful visits. These texts recognise how visitor expectations and motivations cannot be set out in a hierarchy and do not occur sequentially, but nevertheless, all contribute uniquely and concurrently to the total experience.

It is important to acknowledge that learning will not constitute nor characterise the whole experience of a museum visit. Thinking beyond learning experiences in a museum visit entails a shift in how the visitor is perceived. Doering perceives visitor in three distinct ways; 'strangers', who are privileged to be admitted: 'guests', who gratefully receive what museum has to offer, and 'clients', whose needs the museum is obliged to meet (Doering, 1999). In meeting the needs of the visitor,

Doering repurposes the idea of the 'serviscape' from Bitner (Bitner, 1992 in Doering, 1999). The term is used to characterise the museum environment as one in which all aspects/facets operate to engender visitor experiences, for example, ambient conditions such as lighting and noise, spatial layout, signage, and the quality of furnishings. Bitner suggests that all these will influence cognitive and physiological responses to the environment, recalling Wenger's stated importance of the physical site as an environment for learning. The notion of the museum environment as a 'serviscape' which engenders experiences for the visitor situates the museum within Gilmore and Pine's theory of the 'experience economy' as the fourth-stage in the progress of economic evolution (Gilmore & Pine, 1998:97). The experience economy emerges as services become increasingly commoditized (the example is given of long-distance telephone services sold solely on price) and consumers are increasingly understood to desire explicitly designed and promoted experiences, the more memorable the better:

An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event. (Gilmore and Pine, 1998:98)

According to the theory of the experience economy, an experience is not an abstract, amorphous construct but is as tangible and real as any material goods. Crucially, it needs to be memorable. To achieve this, two dimensions of the experience are particularly noteworthy, those of 'customer participation' and 'connection' or 'environmental relationship', encompassing both absorption and immersion.

A further expansion of the literature on visitor experience in the museum context is offered by Doering et al in the notion of 'satisfying experiences'. These are classified into four categories: 'object experiences' arising from direct engagement with authentic material culture; 'cognitive experiences' arising from intellectual engagement that involve the acquisition of knowledge and information; 'introspective experiences' invoking private feelings such as imagining, reflecting, reminiscing and connecting, and 'social experiences' involving interactions with friends, family, museum staff and other visitors (Pekarik, Doering and Karns, 1999).

One of the limitations in the literature on visitor studies is its predominant concern with visitor motivations and immediate experience whilst at the museum. Prentice (1996 in Packer, 2008) argues for the importance of consideration of the benefits derived from a museum visit. Without doing so, understanding the visitor experience will only ever be partial. He posits a consideration of the following four facets of the visit: recreational activities undertaken, the particular setting of the visit, the experience itself and, importantly, the benefits derived from that experience. Only taken together will these four facets enable a meaningful, holistic understanding of the museum visit.

Falk's current, emergent research into situated identities and the museum visitor 'free-choice' learning experience similarly takes as its starting point the case that most visitor studies begin and end inside the walls of the museum, affording only a partial understanding of the visitor's interaction. Studies tend to focus on permanent qualities of either the museum (for example, the content and style of exhibits) or of the visitor (for example socio-economic data or visit frequency). However, the museum visitor experience extends beyond the boundary in time and space of the box (Falk, 2010). Falk argues that the interaction inside the box is ephemeral, intangible and brief, a constructed relationship that uniquely occurs each time a visitor interacts with a museum, whereas the experience of the visit is much broader, commencing before the visit and expressed as motivations and expectations, and continuing subsequent to the visit through the construction of meanings and memories. Falk's research develops a theory of 'identity-related motivation' to suggest that visitors come in order to fulfil specific identity-related needs.

In this theory, the notion of identity is both internal and external, arising from self-perception and in relation to how others perceive us. Given that we each have multiple identities situated within the realities of the physical and socio-cultural world, Falk uses the uppercase I and lowercase i to differentiate between these identities. The uppercase I denotes 'top-line' identities such as gender and nationality, whereas the lowercase i denotes situated identities at particular moments. Falk's research suggests that the lower case 'i' identities motivate museum visits and shape the meaning of the visit, made visible through visitors' descriptions particularly in relation to their expectations and memories of the visit.

The memories and meanings arising from a museum visit are strongly influenced by identity related pre-visit expectations and motivations. Based on thousands of short interviews with museum visitors using a set of laminated cards with visitor statements and images of the exhibitions, Falk has devised five categories of 'i' level identity-based reasons for museum visits as follows:

Explorer – motivated by personal curiosity

Facilitator – motivated by other people e.g. parents, other family groupings. Derive satisfaction from that of their 'guests'

Experience Seeker – desire to see and experience the place or setting of the museum, motivated by the reputation of the museum.

Professional/Hobbyist – motivated by specific knowledge-related goals

Recharger – motivated by a contemplate or restorative visit

An important caveat is that these categories do not fit all museum visitors. Indeed, many visitors will have motivations that span more than one category. However, Falk argues that ultimately it is possible to assign most visitors a dominant motivation. Data arising from the early use of this framework assigns 41% of museum visits to Facilitators, 34% to Experiencers and only 7% to Professionals/Hobbyists. It is essential to acknowledge the generic character of the data, gleaned across a variety of different free-choice learning sites, and its national context, arising from studies carried out in the United States. As such, the framework can be regarded as a tool that enables a feel for what's going on inside our institutions (Falk, 2010), knowledge that can benefit museums by complementing socio-economic data on visitor demographics, thereby affording museums the possibility of creating experiences that can better meet visitor needs, it being the case that "visitors can be better served if we know their entering identity-related visit motivations" (Falk, 2010).

The emphasis on creating different visitor experiences, as opposed to different exhibits or programmes is important, as identity-related motivations are not fixed, but will vary as people visit for different reasons on different days. Crucially for my study, with its detailed exploration of visitor experience framed by initial research into visit motivation, the argument is made that if museums are better to understand their visitors, then research needs to go beyond the five headline 'identity-related motivations' to explore in further depth visitor motivation and memory in the context of a specific institution:

Individuals' visit motivations represent a contextually-specific construct, intimately bound to desires for personal satisfaction and identity. (Falk, 2010)

While Falk's theory of identity-related visit motivations is at an early stage of development, it has become very clear that there is not a 1:1 correlation between the goals of an institution, visitor motivation and expectations, and the extent to which these shape visitor experiences of the museum. Arguably, it is in this space in-between that much of the developmental work can take place in enriching and enhancing visitor experience.

The notion of benefit has been explored in terms of transformation or change, complementing the MLA definition of learning in the museum context. In their work on the benefits of leisure in general, Driver, Brown and Peterson define benefit as "a change that is viewed to be advantageous - an improvement in condition, or a gain to an individual, a group, to society, or to another entity" (1991:4 in Packer, 2008:2).

Packer explores how the ideas of benefit and visitor experience have been theoretically applied in visitor studies through focusing on the twin concepts of 'psychological well-being' and 'mental restoration'. The former concept has developed from positive psychology which seeks to "understand and build the strengths and virtues that improve quality of life and enable individuals and communities to thrive rather than merely survive" (Segilman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000 in Packer, 2008:3). The concept of mental restoration derives from environmental psychology, in particular Attention Restoration Theory which characterises four conditions as integral to mental recovery from fatigue and loss of focus (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989 in Packer, 2008:4). Using a deductive approach, Kaplan et al re-analyse focus group data from a museum study to determine the extent to which the museum environment might support either of these concepts. Their findings suggest that visitors experience the museum in ways related to aspects of both concepts. In turn, Packer argues for an extended understanding of the 'satisfying museum experience' to encompass restorative characteristics.

Arguments for understanding the museum visit through a more holistic approach have steadily gained currency in visitor studies research. Since the 1990s, interest has increasingly focused on the total visitor experience, with visitor studies dominated by theoretical descriptions taking a holistic approach to the museum visit. Rather than an approach which tries to determine individual influences on how visitors learn, qualitative research views the entire visit as an interaction between the visitor(s) and the exhibition. Falk and Dierking (1992) conceptualise the museum experience as an interaction of personal, social and physical contexts that need to be considered together. The significance of the museum environment is a core feature of Falk and Dierking's *Contextual Model of Learning*. Situated within the professional field of Visitor Studies in the United States, this model grew out of their 1992 framework developed by tracking thousands of people throughout their museum visits, observing them in specific exhibitions and conducting innumerable interviews (Falk & Dierking, 2000). The model suggests that three overlapping contexts – the *Personal*, the *Sociocultural*, and the *Physical*– contribute to and influence the interactions and experiences that people have when engaging in free-choice learning activities such as visiting museums. Thus, the experience, and any free-choice learning that results, is influenced by the interactions between these three contexts.

For Csikszentmihalyi, this experience should ideally be one of 'flow'. The concept of 'flow' is a common experiential state described as a state of mind that is "spontaneous, almost automatic, like the flow of a strong current" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995). In this state, learning and satisfaction are optimised. In an article by Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson (the latter a doctoral student in education) on long-term learning in museums, the authors argue that museums need to stimulate intrinsic motivation in order to help their audiences learn. This is in comparison to school-based learning in which extrinsic motivation enforces learning. While interest and curiosity may first attract a museum visitor to an exhibit, the interaction with the exhibit has to be intrinsically rewarding to engage the visitor enough for positive emotional or intellectual changes to occur. If a museum exhibit induces the 'flow' experience, the experience will be intrinsically rewarding and consequently will grow in sensory, intellectual, and emotional complexity. The authors conclude with an appeal for more museums to take an

experimental approach to their exhibits by becoming more active learning institutions.

The museum as an active learning environment has been explored by a number of theorists (Black, 2005; Hein, G. 1994:1995; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999; 2007; Lang et al, 2006; Simon, 2010). In particular, George Hein's work on constructivist learning and the constructivist museum emphasizes the active participation of the learner in making sense of their museum experience (1994; 1995). Hein draws upon Dewey and Pepper's four world views on how knowledge is constructed to consider four learning approaches which have relevance to museums: Expository, Behaviourist, Constructivist, and Discovery Learning. He applies these to the museum to suggest the four commensurate exhibition and display paradigms: Systematic, Orderly, Constructivist and Discovery. Both expository and discovery approaches are based on the epistemological premise that knowledge exists outside the learner. However, whereas in the expository approach the learner is viewed simply as a vessel or warehouse to be filled with subject knowledge, the discovery learning approach is a more active one. It accepts the idea that learners change as they learn – that knowledge acts upon the learner to bring about changes in how their minds work as they learn:

As people learn, their capacity to learn expands; the shape and volume of the mind's warehouse is transformed by the process of grappling with the new information. (Hein, 1995: 30)

While discovery learning often involves physical interaction with the phenomena of the world – engaging with the objects, solving a puzzle – the activity is also a mental process, as much a case of 'minds-on' as 'hands-on'. Proponents of discovery learning will maintain that learning situations can be constructed so as to attain pre-determined outcomes. However, discovery learning need not necessarily imply that an active process of engagement with the phenomena of the world will lead to a neat solution to a problem, or the correct answer to a question. It is as much about the process of exploring the problem or the question as it is about arriving at a destination. In this it overlaps with aspects of constructivist learning and has strong appeal to learning within the museum context, predominantly concerned as it is with learning through and from objects. From an epistemological perspective

constructivist learning has a fundamental difference to that of discovery approaches. Whereas discovery learning presupposes that knowledge exists outside the learner, constructivist learning outcomes need only be valid within the constructed reality of the learner and not in direct relation to an external, objective truth. This is not to say that constructivism endorses an 'anything goes' epistemology. Rather, validity arises from the value of the concepts in leading to action (use) and in the consistency of the ideas one with another (Hein, 1995: 34).

Hein argues that some degree of constructivism is inevitable in human life because we all interpret nature and society differently depending on the rich tapestry of our personal experiences. A constructivist museum exhibition is likely to present content from a range of differing perspectives, and to provide opportunities for learners to utilise their own life experiences in creating meaning independently. The role of independent or autonomous learning is borne out in literature on adult learning:

The point at which a person becomes an adult, psychologically, is that point at which he perceives himself to be wholly self-directing. And at that point he also experiences a deep need to be perceived by others as being self-directing. (Knowles, 2005:85)

Broadly speaking, qualitative research in Visitor Studies conceptualises learning as taking place not simply in discrete pockets of structured educational activity (school workshops, guided tours) but as part of the whole visitor experience, which also comprises multifarious other experiences beyond learning.

A cluster of significant ideas emerge from the above review of learning theory and visitor studies, to be taken forward in this study. These include learning as a transformatory process involving both affective and intellectual cognitive dimensions; the importance of the physical environment in enabling learning experiences; the social aspects of learning, and the extent to which learning informs personal identity. Together these inform a notion of the **Engaging Museum** (this is also the title of Black's textbook for museum studies students).

Notably, research in visitor studies can be provocative in the way it highlights the entwined relationship between the professional practice of curating exhibitions and the visitor experiences engendered therein:

Audience research can be an irritant to those curators accustomed to developing the museum product as they see fit. It can also provoke resistance where it challenges prefigured beliefs and assumptions. (Black, 2005:10)

The relationship between exhibition curating and visitor experience is not causal but something much more complex and nuanced, framed by the historical tension between the museum's commitment to public access, and its responsibility towards the care of collections for the purposes of scholarship and posterity (McClellan, 2003). It is a dimension of visitor studies surprisingly obscure in much research which seeks to understand visitor experiences in museums from a holistic perspective. It is to this area of visitor studies research that the following analysis stands to make its contribution.

Conclusion

Three overarching ideas emerge from Chapter Two. In respect of the museum exhibition as an active site for enabling visitor learning, I have suggested the notion of the **Active Museum**. From the perspective of the institution's disciplinary context of design, an emphasis has emerged concerning the disciplinary specificity of design. This key idea I suggest as the **Distinctive Museum**. The third key idea concerns those characteristics of independent learning understood to be most salient in the context of visitor studies in museums. These encompass learning as a process of transformation, drawing upon prior life experiences and utilising intellectual and affective cognitive registers. This I have summarised as the **Engaging Museum**.

These notions of the Active, Distinctive and Engaging Museum will be reprised in Chapter Five as a conceptual framework for my data analysis. Before doing so, my next chapter presents and discusses my research design in relation to my research strategy, theoretical perspectives, questions of validity and the ethical considerations of workplace research.

CHAPTER THREE: DESIGNING THE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is a complex and potentially messy business. The process of collecting and refining a mass of data in order to render it cogent and meaningful is necessarily selective, contingent upon the configuration of the research questions, which inform and drive all aspects of the research.

As set out in my Introduction, the research questions that I pursue in my study are:

- 1. What are the key institutional, disciplinary and theoretical perspectives for independent adult learning in exhibitions at the Design Museum?*
- 2. How do adult visitors and exhibition curators at the Design Museum describe and understand the role of exhibitions in engendering learning?*
- 3. a) How can learning be characterised through the context of an exhibition visit?
b) To what extent is this characterisation distinctive to the Design Museum?*
- 4. a) How does my study contribute to professional practice at the Design Museum, and more broadly to the field of museum education?
b) What are the emergent questions and implications?*

These questions sit at the heart of my research, informing the phenomena of my enquiry and shaping its concomitant theoretical paradigm, epistemological stance, methodological approach and analytic perspective. In moving from an initial wonderment at the end of my IFS – what might I make of independent learning in the exhibition context? – to the rigorously formulated and presented research design of this chapter, I have grappled with a plethora of considerations, assumptions and implications. These range from the ontological and epistemological - what is the form and nature of the real world and what can be known about it? - to the methodological and practical – what are the salient features of a case study, and shall I give my respondents a glass of wine before, during or after our discussion? A further layer of complexity is added because my research is situated within my own workplace and involves several museum colleagues.

Workplace research intimately involves the researcher in the research process and findings, and necessitates reflexivity at every stage of the study (Delamont in Searle et al, 2004). The embedded relationship between professional context and academic enquiry raises questions of professional ethics, as researching within one's own institution brings with it the need to negotiate the complexities of professional power dynamics and to acknowledge the inevitable presence of the self and one's own perspectives - including biases. Practitioner research implicitly locates the researcher at the heart of their enquiry and demands they be open to having their professional values and beliefs challenged, as a way of better understanding and probing one's professional context. In undertaking this study, I have had to recognise my bias in a commitment to the political agency of the museum as a place of critical and democratic engagement with culture, with education as part of its core purpose. The extent to which the data suggests the importance of affective and apolitical forms of engagement has challenged this particular preconception. Grbich stresses the value for the researcher of interrogating their own perspectives in any research study, arguing that to do so affords the research multiple and enriched perspectives (Grbich, 2004:71). Recognising the extent to which I am a stakeholder with a professional investment in my study has been a fundamental component of my research. Professional development is a key aspect of the EdD, but it cannot be the sole outcome. As such, my findings will not only contribute to the development of professional practice within the Design Museum but equally to theoretical studies in museum education. This is a matter for further reflection and consideration in Chapter Six: Conclusion.

This chapter provides a detailed consideration and critique of the research design of the study, presented in four sections as follows:

- i) Research Paradigm: The Theoretical Perspective of the Study**
- ii) Research Design: Methodology and Methods of the Study**
- iii) Credibility of the Study**
- iv) Workplace Research and Ethical Considerations of the Study**

i) Research Paradigm: The Theoretical Perspective of the Study

In this study I adopt the definition of a paradigm as a theoretical perspective that presents a worldview, that is, a basic set of beliefs that guide action and inform thinking (Guba, 1990: Denzin & Lincoln, 1998:17). When considered from the perspective of research, a paradigm encompasses ontological, epistemological and methodological questions. Crucially, while research designs that are formulated within both quantitative and qualitative fields can yield rich data about the same phenomena, such data will be concerned with different aspects of the phenomena, informed by their commensurate theoretical paradigm.

The fields of quantitative and qualitative research are paradigmatically distinctive, variously described as warring (Carr, 1995 in Denzin and Lincoln), incommensurate and oppositional (Hammersley, 2006: 60) or more neutrally as simply providing an alternative theoretical framework for the enquiry at hand (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 201). A note of caution should be struck regarding a dichotomous reading of quantitative and qualitative fields of research. Within each field, richly diverse approaches can be found based on the questions pursued, which can be as significant as the distinctions between them (Pring, 1996: 48) The danger of the false dualism (Dewey, 1916:323) is that it masks how qualitative and quantitative research can work in complementary fashion. For example, this study seeks to understand how temporary exhibitions at the Design Museum are perceived to engender learning for adult audiences, through interpreting the individual perspectives of a purposive sample of exhibition curators and adult visitors. While the museum has a wealth of quantitative data about the socio-economic demographic of our audiences, commissioned bi-annually through Audiences London, this data does not yield in-depth insight into the attributes and affordances of the museum visit perceived by our audiences whilst visiting an exhibition. This is not to say that such quantitative research is not an important and valuable constituent of audience research, but rather, that it does not provide the data necessary to meet the questions posed by this particular qualitative enquiry, given the importance of context and the pursuit of an understanding of meaning and purpose arising from the perspectives of the respondents.

The context-rich nature of this enquiry, discussed in **Section Two: Research Design** locates it as an entirely different endeavour from quantitative research, a field of enquiry that is as far as possible context free in its precise focus on selected variables and the removal of all other variables that might affect the research findings. The construal of meaning from data gleaned throughout my study will be generated inductively, making a clear distinction from the approach favoured by quantitative research with its efforts to verify or falsify a priori hypotheses. Additionally, the form of understanding that my study pursues does not equate with objective, scientific knowledge that can be directly instrumentalised or universalised. Rather, the insights yielded by my study aim to put qualitative flesh on the quantitative bone of the Design Museum's knowledge and understanding of how our visitors experience the museum.

The history and development of qualitative research in the museum is intimately informed by the epistemological debate relating to shifts in thinking concerning the status and authority of the museum object, and object-based knowledge, within the museum context:

Philosophically and historically [the museum object] came to identify an autonomous entity positively possessing real meaning and supervenient value. In time, its very objectivity has metamorphosed, leaving behind waves of interpretation, affect, and experience. (Hein, 2000:xi)

Epistemological debate is by no means the preserve of museum studies. The landscape of qualitative research today privileges no particular theoretical paradigm over another, and the epistemological status invoked by each paradigm occupies hotly contested theoretical territory (Piper and Stronach, 2006). A summary history of qualitative research's major paradigms, as understood with social science, is set out by way of providing background to the epistemology of social constructionism within which I locate my research.

In the literature on the history and affordances of social sciences research, four major paradigms have been identified: the positivist, post-positivist, constructivist and critical, the latter encompassing cultural, feminist and Marxist theory (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 25). Historically the positivist paradigm dominated the first half

of the twentieth century, contending that research can capture, measure and directly represent the real world objectively and truthfully, offering generalisations free from any bias, subjectivity, social or personal meaning. In the decades following the mid-century, the contention arose that reality cannot be fully apprehended through research, but rather, only approximated. This gave rise to the post-positivist paradigm, in which emphasis is placed on the importance of internal and external verification of research findings that are understood to provide a correspondence with, rather than a copy of, the real world. Key terms of research formulated within the post-positivist paradigm include validity, generalisability, realism and instrumentation. In a robust defence of the realist perspective, Hammersley argues that the enduring relevance of post-positivism can be found in its identification of the central issue of qualitative research, this being not so much the question of whether or not universal knowledge exists to which social science research can gain access, but rather, the status of the knowledge claims to be made through qualitative research (Hammersley in Piper and Stronach, 2006:66). The implications of this issue fuel much of the debate within qualitative research and their relevance to this particular study are addressed in section ii) Research Design.

The post-positivist paradigm was followed by a fertile period in the 1970s and 80s described as one of blurred genres (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:18) in which a multiplicity of new interpretive qualitative perspectives emerged including hermeneutics, structuralism, phenomenology, cultural studies and feminism. Broadly speaking, the common thread within these perspectives was the endeavour to gain insight into the perceptions and understandings of the subjects of the research for only through these perceptions was meaning constructed and knowledge understood (Crotty, 1998:9). The blurred genre period embraced both the constructivist and critical paradigms, and has been described as giving rise to a crisis of representation (Denzin and Lincoln, op.cit). Attention focused on the role of the researcher within the research endeavour, amounting to a much greater reflexive sensibility regarding the extent to which the researcher influenced the process and findings of qualitative research.

Today, a sensibility of doubt infuses qualitative research, doubt as to whether any one paradigm, theory or methodology can enjoy a privileged place and claim to

authoritative knowledge, and the status that can be afforded to such knowledge. At its heart the debates about locating qualitative research within a particular theoretical paradigm concern the epistemological status of the research. Epistemology asks, what can be known about the phenomena in question, and what is the relationship between the researcher and the phenomena under enquiry? To what extent can the findings of the research be presented, defended and accepted as of value both to the research endeavour intrinsically, and extrinsically to the wider contexts for the research? Whereas positivist and post-positivist research embrace concepts of internal and external validity and generalisation, these are not commensurate with the interpretive nature of research formulated within constructivist and critical theories. Instead, questions of the epistemological status of the research are met through the notions of plausibility and credibility, achieved through the research methodology (Hammersley in Piper & Stronach, 1990:61).

Social Constructionism

Located within the constructivist paradigm, the epistemological stance of my research project is social constructionism. Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge which takes as its major view that all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty, 1989: 42). Conceptions of learning are developed and shaped throughout our lives in a process of social exchange informed by historical perspectives. Social constructionism is apposite to my study in that it encompasses the notion that discourses which shape learning are social products constructed through the experience of doing, which, in respect of this study, can encompass the practices of curating and visiting an exhibition. The epistemological perspective which social constructionism offers on the world of knowledge suggests that the meanings that we attribute to the world are not essential, existing a priori to human consciousness of the world. Rather, they are constructed in the interaction between mind and what Humphrey calls worldstuff, that is, the phenomenal form of the world before it was represented by a mind (Humphrey, 1993: 17). These meanings are intimately informed by the cultural discourses and contexts within which they take shape. They are shared, formed out of the collective generation of meaning as shaped by the conventions of language and other social processes (Schwandt in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998:127).

The value of social constructionism as a theory of knowledge for my study is twofold: first, for the relevance of the theory to the social, inter-subjective nature of free-choice learning within the exhibition context, in which curators and visitors are engaged in discursive strategies through the expository agency of the temporary exhibition (Bal, 1996:7). Second, through the stance put forward by social constructionism that meanings which arise through the processes of social exchange are not considered to offer essential or fundamental truths but rather what Crotty terms “useful interpretations”:

What constructionism drives home unambiguously is that there is no true or valid interpretation. There are useful interpretations, to be sure, and these stand over against interpretations that appear to serve no useful purpose. (Crotty, 1989:47)

Crucially, what constitutes a useful interpretation arises through discretionary judgment, informed by a critical view of the research design formulated to arrive at that point of interpretation - an interpretation that will always be conjectural and subject to reinterpretation. This position is closely entwined with the idea that museums today operate within an epistemological perspective in which the idea of a single cultural narrative, voice or meaning no longer holds sway. Rather, museums have broadly embraced a multivalent plurality of narratives and potential meanings widely explored in the literature on the museum concept (Crimp, 1993; Farago & Preziosi, 2003; Genoways, 2006; Hein, G. 1998; Hein, H. 2000; Knell et al, 2007; Marstine, 2006). The notion of multiple meanings and useful interpretations does not encompass the radical post-modernist notion of paralogy, involving constant dissent and nothing beyond the endless play of local and localised vocabularies and stories (Smith in Piper and Stronach, 2006: 53). Rather, it is one in which some interpretations and meanings are more plausible, and more credible, than others, based on the integrity of the research design.

ii) Research Strategy - the Case Study

The selection of case study strategy for my research arises from the localised nature of my enquiry. Denscombe summarises the key features of the case study as casting an in-depth ‘spotlight’ on one instance, in which the focus is on relationships and processes within that instance, in a natural setting. An important distinction is drawn between the case study as a research strategy, and the use of multiple sources and methods within that strategy (Denscombe 1998/2010:32). I have designed my case study to encompass a number of distinctive features intended to enable the most effective and fertile gleaning and analysis of my data in relation to my research questions and local context. These features are:

- the salience of context
- the perspectival, interpretive approach to the construing of meaning through the data
- the multiple method approach to data gathering

In this section, I consider each of these features in relation to my study.

The Salience of Context

The case study approach focuses on a discreet phenomenon, particular instance or unit of enquiry “in its own right” (Robson, 2002: 179). It is a strategy characterised by a pursuit of insight into and understanding of a phenomenon which is neither ahistorical nor autonomous. In my study, the instance of enquiry is free-choice learning in the exhibition context at the Design Museum. However, while the case is studied in its own right, its contexts are equally significant in enabling the research findings to give rise to implications beyond the immediate locality of the enquiry (Robson, 2002:177/8), a consideration that invites Miles and Huberman to suggest that in some cases the term ‘site’ might be preferable to that of ‘case’, because “it reminds us that a ‘case’ always occurs in a specified social and physical *setting*: we cannot study individual cases devoid of their context in a way that a quantitative researcher often does” (Miles and Huberman, 1994:27).

The salience of context in academic educational research raises the question of the value of the local enquiry to broader work in the relevant scholarly field. To this end, before refining the focus of this research by localising it to the Design Museum setting and investigating the case in-depth in Chapters Four and Five, I extend the focus of the study by exploring its broader, distinctive contexts in Chapter Two: Literature Review. Consideration of each of these is essential not only for the direct relevance of my analysis to my workplace, but also in developing arguments for the value of my research findings beyond the Design Museum. It is within these broader contexts that I explore the wider implications and value of the research in Chapter Six: Conclusion.

The importance of context in case study research can be traced to work in social sciences in the 1960s when researchers turned their attention to their own societies rather than to those farther afield. Of relevance to my study was the resulting recognition of the complexity and distinctiveness of the structures, professional roles and rules of organisations such as schools, prisons and hospitals in shaping human behaviour, perceptions and responses to research initiatives in education:

The new research approach accepted the multifaceted complexity of real world educational settings and tried to interpret and understand how various environmental components contributed to the consequences of attempting to bring about some educational innovation. (Hein, 1999: 66)

The characteristics of learning in museums is potent with such ‘multifaceted complexity’, and thus the Literature Review sets the scene for my subsequent enquiry by reviewing the key multiple contexts for my research and locating the study in its historical moment. In the value afforded to contexts, case study research differs vastly from quantitative experimental design that endeavours as far as possible to keep the focus of the research separate from other influences on the subject. Rather, the qualitative case study approach actively embraces and invites a holistic understanding of data encompassing a multitude of environmental components. Such components might be explicit, for example, in exhibition design, or implicit, for example in respondents’ personal lives, expressed in the data through reference to prior knowledge and expectations. The importance of respondents’ personal contexts, as environmental components of case study research, leads to the

second of the key features of this study, that of the perspectival, interpretive approach to data gathering and analysis.

The Perspectival, Interpretive Approach

Within a qualitative, naturalistic case study strategy a preference exists for ‘in vivo’ research that uses the language of respondents in the process of analysis rather than importing and privileging a theoretical language a priori through and against which to read the data.

By allowing subjects more freedom to talk as they wish, using entire responses in analysis and reporting representative samples as part of research findings, naturalistic researchers employ an alternative approach that capitalises on the unique quality of human experience. (Hein, 1998/2002:72)

In my study, the perspective of curators on their intentions for exhibitions, and visitors’ experiences of those exhibitions, is integral to conceptualising learning in the museum. In keeping with the constructivist paradigm, the findings of the research arise through a negotiation between the perspectives of the researcher and those of the researched. Such findings are presented as Crotty’s ‘useful interpretations’ rather than as quantitatively enabled facts that invite no further investigation or critique. The interpretive nature of the analysis raises questions about the credibility of the research, questions which are addressed to a large extent, although not entirely, through the multiple method approach of the design set out below.

The Multiple Method Approach

My case study involves three phases of complementary mixed methods of data gathering as a means of providing effective triangulation of data and affording credibility to the findings, thereby reducing the risk of ‘inappropriate certainty’ that might privilege one set of perspectives over another (Robson, 2002:370). The multiple method approach is an essential component of rigorous case study research:

Case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life contexts using multiple sources of evidence. (Robert Yin (1981; 1994) in Robson 178)

The design methods selected in this thesis to provide multiple sources of data are:

- a small scale visitor survey using Visit Cards
- a Visitor Research Group with five respondents
- Semi-structured interviews with four exhibition curators at the Design Museum

Phase One: Visit Cards

The purposive sample of five visitors for the Visitor Research Group was drawn from a random sample of fifty adult visitors who visited the museum informally, independently and voluntarily throughout the period of the case study exhibitions. To gather the data, I positioned myself at the foot of the museum's main staircase in the light-filled atrium over the course of a week and asked fifty visitors to complete visit cards as they proceeded to the exhibitions, and to indicate whether they would be interested in participating in the research group (Appendix B). I designed the cards to elicit insight into the headline reasons visitors attributed for their visits, described on the cards as motivations and expectations. On the back of the cards, visitors were then asked to reflect on their experiences of the exhibitions directly after visiting. Unlike formal education visits to the museum, the majority of which are structured and timed, free choice adult visits are informal and can range from the whistle-stop half hour exhibition tour to an in-depth engagement over a whole day. The potential spectrum of experiences is broad, and hence the cartoons were not only a pragmatic way of identifying a purposive sample for the research group, but also, through thematic analysis, a way of gaining a snapshot insight into the range of visitor motivation, expectation and perceived benefits. I used these insights to inform the questions for the subsequent research group.

The challenge in organising the Visitor Research Group was to identify articulate visitors who could provide the sought-after insights into how learning might be conceptualised in the exhibition context. Therefore in order to secure respondents

who would be able to make engaged and in-depth contributions, my approach to sampling was self-selecting, in that the bubble cartoons included a request for visitors to participate in further research into visitor attitudes, perceptions and experiences whilst at the museum. Thus the sample is partial towards those visitors who have a strong commitment to and interest in articulating and further exploring their experiences as visitors to the museum. Given the localised nature of the study and its endeavour to provide insight into a particular context and setting, this selective sample can be understood as purposive (Robson, 2002: 264).

Phase Two: Visitor Research Group

Originating in consumer market research, visitor research groups are a common visitor studies method used in museums, although their format tends to be less formalised than within the commercial sector. The adoption of the term ‘research’ rather than ‘focus’ group is intended to reflect the dialogic and open-ended nature of this enquiry. The standard focus group methodology involves bringing together a group of interviewees with a trained interviewer to discuss a particular topic or product in a directed discussion. The most extensive published use of focus groups in museums was research sponsored by the Getty Centre for Education in the Arts and Getty Museum in 1991 in a research study involving eleven major North American museums. Revealingly, this major study identified notable slippage between the expectations of museum staff for their visitors and visitors’ accounts of their experiences of the museum (Hein, 1998/2002:127). While it is not my intention in this research to read visitor voice against that of curators, but rather, alongside, the process of exploring the extent to which my respondents present shared perspectives on learning will necessarily involve the detailing of any major disjunctions should they emerge from my data.

My research group took place at the museum one month subsequent to the initial data gathering using the Visit Cards. It was of two-hour duration and was facilitated by an independent interviewer commissioned by the museum’s Communications Department.

Visitor respondents chose to be identified anonymously in my research. To enable my reader to differentiate between visitor and museum respondents I use first names

for Visitor Research Group respondents, and numerical descriptions for Curators. My Visitor Research Group included the following respondents:

Figure 1: Visitor Research Group Respondents

<i>Name</i>	<i>Brief demographic information</i>
Bill	Automotive design student (MA), a museum member, visits frequently, on average four times a year.
Karina	Full-time mum, former background in computing, on a career break to raise her family, first time-visitor to the museum.
Danielle	Art and Design teacher, on a career break to raise her family, has visited the museum previously but not as regular a visitor as Bill, comes to the family workshops. Visits the museum on average twice yearly.
Rose	Full-time mum, former background in charitable fundraising and fashion buying, strong interest in fashion and product design, first-time visitor.
Marnie	Fashion design student (MA), a museum member and regular visitor.

At the time of designing this study, the Design Museum's audience research was quantitative, measuring the socio-economic demographics of visitors and rating their satisfaction levels on visiting (Audiences London, 2008/9). Formulating the study occasioned the opportunity to work with the Head of Communications to carry out qualitative research which would serve the needs of this particular enquiry whilst also contributing to a new area in the museum's audience development activity. The cross-over between the visitor research group as a component of my EdD and equally as part of the museum's audience development activity is one of the distinctive features of practitioner research, enabling both a contribution to scholarship in the relevant field and to the development of practice within the case study institution. By working with an independent, professional focus group facilitator, the museum could use the data with confidence beyond the attuned

interests of this study, avoiding what Robson describes as the ‘prophet in own country’ phenomenon (Robson, 2002: 535). Furthermore, the presence of the independent facilitator enabled me to occupy a position as participant observer, able to watch the discussion unfold and to contribute prompts to further discussion when necessary.

Given my study’s aim to provide insight into how visitors understand their learning whilst visiting an exhibition, I did not engage with a non-visiting audience demographic. While this particular demographic falls outside the scope of my research, non-visitor research is nevertheless a valuable tool. As a vital component to the museum’s audience development project of 2009, a survey was commissioned with Morris Hargreaves MacIntyre, a research consultancy widely experienced in working with the museums sector, which asked visitors at other similar London museums why they had not visited the Design Museum, the findings from which have informed the museum’s marketing strategy.

Whilst a visitor research group with a small sample of adult audiences was a new undertaking for the Design Museum, it is a research method commonly used elsewhere in the sector. As I hope is evidenced in my research, using carefully developed questions with a small, purposive number of visitors to engage with an exhibition enables the acquisition of significantly more valuable information from a small sample of visitors than from less intrusive data gathering with a larger, random sample of museum visitors. The Visitor Studies Group in the UK firmly advocates the value of qualitative research with visitors, positioning it as a way to provide essential professional knowledge for curators, and to maintain a freshness of approach that will engage audiences:

Research with visitors then, reveals what they care about in the subject matter and the kind of gallery experience they would enjoy. And modern curators and interpreters are glad to have this as a working base. (Fisher, 2009)

Phase Three: Semi-Structured Interviews with Curators

The choice of semi-structured interviews as a data gathering method is based on its potential to explore the research phenomenon from a variety of angles, offering an

in-depth exploration of the significance respondents attach to the research phenomena. The scope of discussion afforded through the semi-structured approach allows respondents to reflect on and explore the full import of the questions from perspectives not necessarily anticipated by the researcher:

If you believe that the significance or ‘meaning’ of what is done lies in the ideas, intentions, values and beliefs of the agent, then those ideas need to be taken into account. (Pring, 1996: 38)

Exhibitions offer a complex set of stimuli for learning, not only in relation to the exhibits and the overall exhibition design (which carry a multitude of implicit concepts), but also to the assumptions, expectations and philosophical differences that exist among curators and exhibition designers, whose efforts produce the exhibition physically and conceptually. In the semi-structured interviews I endeavoured to dig deep into curatorial practice in order to unravel the import of these assumptions, expectations and philosophical differences for conceptualising learning. Taken together, they constitute the expository agency of curatorial practice which contributes to how visitors experience exhibitions (Wolf and Tymitz 1978b:2 in Pekarik).

Figure 2: Curator Respondents

<i>Name</i>	<i>Brief Background</i>
Curator A	BA Design History
Curator B	MA Art History
Curator C	BA Product Design, MA Curating Contemporary Design
Curator D	BA Product Design. Also practising designer and design critic

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically. As part of the ethos of inclusive research, transcripts were returned to curators for their further comment, enabling the data gathering process to become dialogic. Throughout the process of interviewing I took memorising notes to read subsequently alongside the transcriptions when undertaking my analysis (Glaser, 1978:83).

While semi-structured interviews offer a host of advantages to the enquiry, the method is not without its weaknesses. Arguments are made that studies seeking understanding solely from the perspective of respondents are only of interest to those in the same situation. For the study to be of value beyond the particular event, and if it is to serve professional interests within museum education, it is imperative that the findings of the research be critiqued against the broader contexts set out in the Literature Review. Additionally, from the perspective of social constructionism adopted for this study, the philosophical problem arises of the extent to which the researcher can understand the significance of respondents' words, because they inhabit their own unique world of beliefs and understandings. It is, perhaps, more helpful to understand the semi-structured interviews as a negotiation between the subjective worlds of intentions, beliefs and meanings of respondents and researcher. This interpretive process is theorised in social sciences research as 'symbolic interactionism', based on the understanding that people interpret and define each other's actions rather than simply reacting to each other (Blumer, 1969).

iii) Credibility of the Study

Within the qualitative field and constructivist paradigm in which this study is located, the core concepts of validity, reliability and generalisability that underpin quantitative research need careful rethinking. In order to ascertain the value of the research both for its intrinsic context and the broader field of scholarship to which it aims to make its contribution, the notion of 'credibility' is preferred. This research aims to provide a rich and layered description of its specific situation, that gains credibility by being believable both on its own terms and when read within the wider context of scholarship in museum education. Such credibility is achieved through the multiple method research design that encompasses the three methods of data gathering outlined above, a process of 'triangulation' which Robson describes as akin to the navigational process of fixing a bearing on earth's surface from three different points (Robson, 1993:185). It refers to the extent to which the literature reviewed and the data gathered convincingly focuses on the phenomenon in question. However, relying on a threefold overlap of information from the visit cards, interviews and research group to offer a persuasive argument for the story of the research is not to say that consistency is encountered across each of the methods.

Rather, through the process of triangulating data, the analysis opens up discrepancies and disagreements which the researcher must unravel as part of the intricacies of data analysis (Denscombe, 2009).

The argument for credibility as a response to questions of validity within qualitative research is extended by Hammersley, when he states that the two key aspects of validity for qualitative research are plausibility as well as credibility. Plausibility rests on whether or not research findings and claims can be judged as likely to be true given our existing knowledge based either on the claim at face value, if it is immediately plausible, or on the presentation of evidence. In the former case, a discretionary judgement must be made about the credibility of the claim given the nature of the phenomena concerned, and the circumstances of the research (Hammersley, 1990:61). In their dependence on discretionary judgments, both plausibility and credibility are subjective in nature and as such sit comfortably within the theory of social constructionism that informs this study. Furthermore, the discretionary judgements with which the findings and conclusion of this study are to be considered by its readers are integral to the research process.

The analytic process of formulating the findings and subsequent conclusion is one of making connections rather than ascertaining facts, given that qualitative researchers synthesize data rather than correlate observed variables (Robson, 2000:27). These connections emerge from the multiple data over repeated readings. Through each reading I noted the emergent themes in my research journal, tabulating them into a series of categories that I ultimately refined into analytic codes. That is, my codes emerged from my data, rather than existing independent of the data which is then combed for correspondences (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson 1990:24). The process of analysing data was concurrent with the interviews and research group, as I found each experience of data-gathering drew upon earlier instances in the field, enabling connections to be made both between ideas arising through the literature review and across the growing body of data, as attested by memorising notes in the my journal:

I've become quite adept at listening and critiquing at the same time. Donna describes the breed of 'new' curator and immediately I hear Gemma

chuckling about ceramicist connoisseurs and their predilection for dusty antique shops, and think of Lynne Cooke's paper about how destabilised curatorial practice seems to be today. (Charman, 2009)

iv) Workplace Research and Ethical Considerations

As stated at the outset of this chapter, workplace research entails careful consideration of the position of the researcher and the status of the research, particularly in respect of professional colleagues and the host institution (Kelly & Ali, 2004). In my study, issues of 'insider' research came to the fore most explicitly when interviewing professional colleagues. My strategy was to adopt a position of peer researcher. My ethical stance was that as colleagues, museum respondents should where possible share equal status in the research process. This is not to say that my study is not 'owned' by me, but rather, that I made the parameters of my research as explicit and transparent as possible, and sought a dialogic relationship with curatorial colleagues. The semi-structured interview method involves the researcher directly and personally in the research endeavour. The analytic method of formulating categories that emerge from the data, in which taxonomies and accompanying narrative summary descriptions are developed, requires intense cognitive input from the researcher, whilst the process of writing up, selecting quotes and excerpts from the original data all emphasize the role of the researcher in the process (Searle et al, 2004).

All curators had the opportunity to read and edit their transcripts in order to make further contributions or clarifications (Appendix C). Although no amendments, excisions or additions were made to the transcripts, this process of sharing my data contributed to the vibrancy of professional conversation within the museum, bringing the respective departments of Learning and Exhibitions one step closer to a shared vocabulary and enriched understanding of key aspects of our professional practice. Additionally, respondents were aware that it was their views and their practices that were to inform the conceptual model. The aim of practitioner enquiry is to work from the ground up rather than to impose a top-down model. There is a utilitarian flavour as well as an ethical underpinning to this approach, in that

research which is understood to be embedded and localised in a professional practice context is more likely to contribute to new approaches to that practice:

Practical enquiry, then, is not conducted for purposes of developing general laws related to educational practice, and is not meant to provide *the* answer to a problem. Instead, the results are suggestive of new ways of looking at the context and problem and/or possibilities for changes in practice.
(Richardson, 1994:7)

In designing my research, I have been motivated by a commitment to dialogic professional enquiry, intrinsic to which is the quality of respectful collaboration. As researcher, I have aimed to speak with my respondents, rather than speak for them, and have striven for honesty and openness in the relationship between me and all my respondents, all of whom have had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Formally, this study complies with the BERA guidelines and the IoE Ethical guidelines. Specifically, all respondents were asked to give their informed verbal and written consent before participating in the interviews and research group, based on information about the aims, purposes and dissemination routes of findings involved in my research and its value for the museum (Appendix D). The rich data elicited through my research design is the focus of Chapter Four: Data Presentation.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION

In this chapter I present a representative selection of data in response to the following research question:

How do visitors and exhibition curators at the Design Museum describe and understand the role of exhibitions in enabling adult learning?

As previously outlined in Chapter Three, this data was gathered across three phases of my research:

Phase One: Visit Cards

Phase Two: Visitor Research Group

Phase Three: Semi-Structured Interviews with Curators

I have organised the presentation of my data into three sections commensurate with each of these stages. In order to give my reader a better sense of the Design Museum at the time of data gathering, a summary is offered of the two exhibitions programmed during the first two stages of my research (the Visit Cards and Visitor Research Group) accompanied by a small selection of images of the exhibitions. I am grateful to Luke Hayes for granting permission to include these in my study. These exhibitions were, respectively, a multi-disciplinary thematic survey exhibition entitled *Designs of the Year* and a monographic exhibition of fashion design by Hussein Chalayan, entitled *From Fashion and Back*.

Section One then presents data gleaned from the use of Visit Cards. Sections Two and Three identify and consider the main themes arising from the responses of research participants, with section two devoted to visitor voices and section three to curator voices. Both sections include extensive use of verbatim examples from my data in order to afford as full an insight as possible into respondents' experiences. In treating visitor and curator voice equally, and applying the same method of data analysis and presentation, my aim is to avoid privileging one group of respondents over another.

Designs of the Year (12 February – 14 June 2009) is an annual exhibition in which a comprehensive and diverse collection of one hundred of the world's most forward-looking designs are nominated for inclusion by industry experts drawn from professional and academic backgrounds. Spanning the main design disciplines of Architecture, Fashion, Furniture, Graphics, Interactive, Product and Transport design, the rationale for nomination given by each of the industry experts is included alongside an image of the work in a pocket size book that provides the main source of interpretation material for the exhibition. A smaller panel of judges decides on category winners from which one final winning award is selected. In 2009 this panel was chaired by Alan Yentob. His panellists were designer, educator and environmentalist Karen Blincoe, architect Peter Cook, MoMA's senior design and architecture curator Paola Antonelli, and fashion author, stylist and critic Sarah Mower and the winner of the previous year's award, designer Yves Béhar who designed 'One Laptop Per Child'. Commenting on the shortlist for the exhibition, the panel described how they were "captivated by the stories behind the winning projects and how they demonstrate the strength of design as a tool for cultural, political and social change" (Exhibition Press Release, December 2008). The awards aspect of the exhibition is billed as recognizing the important achievements in design over the past twelve months as well as bringing lesser known design triumphs to the fore. Public participation is also invited through a 'People's Choice' vote and a blog for the general public to express their views at <http://www.designsoftheyear.com>.

In 2009 the seven category winners were as follows:

Architecture: New Oslo Opera House

Fashion: Vogue Italia: A Black Issue

Furniture: MYTO chair

Graphics: Barack Obama Poster (eventual overall winner)

Interactive: Make Magazine

Product: Magno Wooden Radio

Transport: Colombia's Line-J Medellin Metro Cable

Hussein Chalayan: From Fashion and Back (22 January – 17 May 2009) was a monographic exhibition and the first comprehensive presentation of Chalayan's work in the UK. Spanning fifteen years of experimental projects, the exhibition considered the fashion designer's creative approach through exploring personal inspirations and professional themes such as cultural identity, displacement and migration. Presenting fashion as a site of conceptual exploration, and motivated by ideas and disciplines not readily associated with fashion, Hussein Chalayan's pioneering work was presented with an emphasis on its cross-disciplinary character, in which architecture, design, philosophy, anthropology, science and technology all feature. Working at the forefront of contemporary fashion design, Hussein Chalayan's work is renowned for its innovative use of materials, meticulous pattern cutting and progressive attitudes to new technology.

Overleaf:

Figure 3a: Installation image *Designs of the Year 2009* (Product category)

Figure 3b: Installation image *Designs of the Year 2009* (Graphics category)

Figure 3c: Installation image *Designs of the Year 2009* Marloes Ten Bohmer 'Rotational Moulded Shoe' (2009)

Figure 4a: Installation image *From Fashion and Back* 'Inertia' (2009)

Figure 4b: Installation image *From Fashion and Back* 'Panoramic' (1998)

Figure 4c: Installation image *From Fashion and Back* 'Before Minus Now' (2000)

Figure 3a: Installation image *Designs of the Year 2009* (Product category)

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Figure 3b: Installation image *Designs of the Year 2009* (Graphics category)

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Figure 3c: Installation image *Designs of the Year 2009* (Marloes Ten Bohmer's
'Rotational Moulded Shoe (2009)

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Figure 4a: Installation image *From Fashion and Back* 'Inertia' (2009)

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Figure 4b: Installation image *From Fashion and Back* 'Panoramic' (1998)

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Figure 4c: Installation image *From Fashion and Back* 'Before Minus Now' (2000)

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i) Visit Cards

This section summarises the findings of the fifty Visit Cards in tabulated form. The tables include a breakdown by percentage of the main reasons cited for a visit to the Design Museum, immediate reflections on leaving the exhibitions and illustrative quotes. The Visit Cards were designed to capture the expectations and reflections on an exhibition visit from a random sample of fifty adult visitors who visited the museum informally and voluntarily throughout the period of the case study exhibitions, and for whom learning was not necessarily an explicit part of their motivation for visiting. The cartoons were drawn by Richard Hogg, a graphic designer. They feature a cartoon character approaching and leaving the museum, with an empty thought bubble hovering over their head in which visitors wrote their comments. I intended the cards to be a light touch way of gaining insight into the headline reasons visitors attributed for their visits, described on side one of the cards as motivations (this side was entitled BEFORE), and into their immediate responses subsequent to their visit on side two (entitled AFTER). The thought bubbles were accompanied by the following text:

BEFORE card

We'd love your feedback on your visit today to help us make your experience of the Design Museum even better. Fill in the thought bubble and please tell us what you are hoping to get out of being here today – your expectations, why you've come, what you are looking forward to most – and then once you've finished your visit let us know what stands out about it on the AFTER cartoon.

AFTER card

Your ideas and reflections really do matter to us in helping us develop our museum programme. Please take a moment to note down your key impressions and thoughts now you have visited.

The cards were completed over the course of a week in which I stood at the bottom of the museum's main staircase for an hour a day, in its glassy and light-filled atrium, at the point where visitors have their tickets checked before entering the exhibitions, until I had captured fifty responses. The cards also included a request to

visitors to indicate whether they would be interested in participating in the research group, which I had scheduled to take place at the museum in the following month. and a question as to whether they were first time visitors. This information was useful in enabling me to be a little more purposive in the demographic constitution of the Visitor Research Group, as I was keen to ensure I had representation of a first time visitor alongside visitors who visit regularly and are therefore familiar with the museum.

In keeping with the perspectival and interpretive approach of this study, set out in Chapter Three: Designing the Research, I did not intend the data generated by the visit cards to be used as an exercise in positivist evaluation, in which visitor expectations and reflections would be read and measured comparatively. Rather the cards were used within a qualitative, interpretive undertaking designed to elicit the main characteristics visitors attribute to their visit and initial impressions on their experiences. This is not to say that any significant shifts between motivations and reflections are not noted in my presentation of the data. I used these characteristics and shifts to inform the questions for the Visitor Research Group. The cards were intended to capture the flavour of visitor experiences, as well as to be a pragmatic way of identifying potential participants for my research group.

Of the fifty completed cards, I received the following number of responses:

24 were returned with comments about expectations (BEFORE).

25 were returned with comments about responses (AFTER).

10 were returned with comments about both expectations and responses.

1 was returned with an illustrated response.

My presentation is based on all of the responses, with the illustrated card identified within the 'Other' category. Given that my purpose in this exercise was to garner some broad headline themes or areas for further consideration in the Visitor Research Group, rather than to undertake a comparative or evaluative analysis of expectations and reflections, the ten fully completed cartoons were not explored in any greater depth than the remaining cards. It is interesting to note that only one visitor completed their card diagrammatically rather than in word form. As the

ensuing data presentation suggests, the preference among visitors for image over word is such that I find myself retrospectively surprised that this only happened once.

Figure 5: Visitor Motivations and Expectations (the number of cards is given in brackets, from a total 25)

Motivation/ Expectation:	Total Responses	Verbatim Examples
Exhibition specific	76% (15)	To understand more about design and design work. Currently studying at university and research from the museum will help inspire me more. I came here for inspiration for a design project at work.
General design interest	25% (6)	I'm very excited to be visiting the Design Museum - not sure entirely what to expect – hoping for a great building experience with interesting architecture and design features throughout the building.
Exhibition Design	8% (2)	I'm interested in how the museum will present Fashion.
Other	8% (2)	

The predominance of visitors (76%) who describe their expectation of the visit as seeking exhibition-specific information and inspiration is striking. Within Falk’s model of identity-related visit motivations, these visitors would be classified in the ‘Professionals/Hobbyists’ category (denoting visitors seeking knowledge-related goals), to which Falk attributes just 7% of visitors. Based on this limited data, the high percentage of ‘Professionals/Hobbyists’ visit motivations to the Design Museum bears further consideration. It suggests the large extent to which the

Design Museum attracts a design specialist audience whose motivations and expectations of their visit directly relate to their design knowledge and a perceived educational output. Given that the Design Museum charges for entry – currently £8.50 for entry to all exhibitions – it is perhaps not surprising that visitor motivations revolve around an explicit interest in design. However, the atypical findings of the Visit Card exercise also extend to the absence amongst my small sample of visitors of Falk's 'Facilitator' motivation (visitors who come to the museum in order to facilitate a museum experience for others in their party, and who derive satisfaction from that of their 'guest'). Falk attributes 41% to this category. Although the smallest of the motivation categories, shared with 'Other', it is also notable that an interest in exhibition design was cited as a factor for visiting. These atypical findings calls attention to the specificity of context in undertaking any visitor studies research: Falk's research was carried out in the United States across a wide variety of museum typologies and an extensive visitor sample, whereas my study focuses on a single institution, and the sample is much smaller. Moreover, the atypical character underlines the importance of exercising caution in the application of frameworks or general theories to understand museum visitors, for there is always the exception to the rule, which bears further exploration not least for what it might offer by way of critiquing Falk's theory.

Figure 6: Visitor Reflections (the number of cartoons in brackets, from a total of 25)

Reflections	Total Responses	Verbatim Examples
Content-related: Inspiration Ideas Information	40% (10)	<p>Was worth it for the different topics / themes, taking this forward into my degree course and using relevant information and design.</p> <p>Interesting for my education work</p> <p>Definitely inspires me to further education in graphic design.</p>
General Interest – Originality	32% (8)	<p>I came here to gain inspiration and ideas for my final project at college. I have never seen anything like today so I was very surprised and pleased.</p> <p>Original ideas and presentation. Very creative designs / ideas. Inspiring.</p> <p>Very thought provoking exhibition – much more than I expected from fashion – sensory overload!</p>
Exhibition Design	28% (7)	<p>It had good flow to it. There was a lot to take in but it worked.</p> <p>Good exhibit design, good flow and information displays in both exhibits. Really interesting mix of different designs.</p> <p>Designs of the Year - Liked the way you moved around the space – the way it took you.</p> <p>I think that there is excellent use of space and everything is spaced out in a relevant way.</p>

In the AFTER cards, content related responses broadly fall across themes of inspiration, information and creative ideas. Notably, a significant shift takes place towards comments concerning the exhibition design, from only 8% relating to visit motivation to 28% in visitor reflections. Perhaps unsurprisingly given this swing, the extent to which exhibition design influences visitor engagement proved to be a fertile area for discussion, not least the use of the term ‘flow’ on more than one occasion to describe the experience. This notion is further explored in Chapter Five in relation to characterising learning in the exhibition context. Significant other new topics related to affective responses to the exhibitions such as enjoyment, and the extent to which the exhibition experience surpassed visitor expectations, with several comments about originality and surprise, recalling Pekarik on allowing space within visitor studies for the unexpected outcome (Pekarik, 2010). From the little that can be surmised from the limited data afforded by the cartoons, it appears that the majority of visitor motivations and reflections related to instrumental knowledge, that is, knowledge for the purpose of professional practice or formal education.

The key ideas taken forward from my summary presentation and discussion of the Visit Cards to the Visitor Research Group focused on:

- content-related goals for visits (inspiration, creative ideas and information)
- the role of exhibition design in shaping visitor experience
- the extent to which exhibitions engendered affective and sensory responses.

ii) Visitor Research Group

The Visitor Research Group was held at the museum in the month following the implementation of the cartoons. I invited five respondents, based on their expressions of interest in response to the following question included on the card:

We'd really like to explore your thoughts further in a research group at the museum. Please do leave your contact details below so we can continue the discussion.

The small size of the group was intentional as I wanted to be able to devote the two-hour discussion to in-depth and collective conversation, giving participants the opportunity to ponder their responses both individually and together. Brief demographic information on my respondents – Bill, Karina, Marnie, Rose and Danielle – can be found on page 65.

The research group took place at the museum on a late spring evening. Respondents were given half an hour to revisit the exhibitions in order to refresh their memory – and the wine was uncorked early on in the discussion. In the following presentation of data 'in vivo', my aim is to provide insight into how learning is understood to take place within the exhibition visit from the perspectives of my respondents. To this end I have selected quotes that most appositely put forward the dimensions of, and impetuses for, learning as perceived by them. The quotes are accompanied by brief commentary, further developed in Chapter Five within an analytical framework derived from the Literature Review. Data presentation is structured across the themes and sub-headings set out below:

Theme One: Modes of Engagement

- Visual
- Affective

Theme Two: Visitor Identity

- Extrinsic motivation
- Intrinsic motivation

Theme Three: Exhibition Design

*Theme One: Modes of Engagement*Visual Modes of Engagement

It's almost as if you take a learning journey, it's like a little film, you capture different images through it. (Rose)

Rose's comment that her journey through the exhibition was like a little film emphasizes the dynamic and visual dimension of her experience, expressed through the notion of taking snapshots throughout the visit. This emphasis on the visual dimension of the exhibition experience was to recur throughout the discussion and will prove to be significant both as a mode of engagement in, and recollection of, participants' visits in my data analysis. Describing their experience of the exhibitions as filmic or as set pieces from theatre suggests the learning journey as a series of 'mis-en-scene'. In which every component is deliberately organised for visual effect. In the extensive talk concerning how participants looked at design and the value attributed to visual interpretation material in enabling meaning-making, a pronounced aversion was manifest to extensive textual descriptions about exhibits:

I found the written information too blocky. (Bill)

Try to get the story across without having lots of writing. Use images, film footage. That's when I understood what you were getting at. You can go backwards and forwards between the film footage and the work and that didn't need any writing. (Marnie)

The reality was, I enjoyed not having loads of text. (Rose)

In setting out their preferred approaches to interpretative media and content, participants placed great emphasis on visual material relating to the process of design. This included examples of designers' inspiration (sketchbooks and mood-boards), the availability of different materials as part of exhibition content (such as fabric swatches), and footage or still images of manufacturing and production techniques and of the designs in their real world context.

The supporting information was really good. I needed to see someone actually riding the bike to understand the relevance. (Marnie)

You could see how the shoes were made, which is what really interested me a lot. (Danielle)

After I saw the catwalk shows, I understood more about his use of technology. I then saw the actual clothes, and it made me understand the technology of the fabric. The clothes came alive. (Rose)

Looking at the table top, I wanted to know, how was it manufactured to be so thin? (Bill)

Participants proposed that the most effective form of interpretation material would be visual ‘snapshots’ of elements of the design process, across and between which they could make connections to scaffold together a fuller and personal understanding of the work. Significantly, participants repeatedly grounded their talk about interpretative material in a desire for further insight into the design process. Based on my small visitor sample, it appears that the more knowledgeable the visitor is about design (in reference to Bill and Marnie, both studying design at postgraduate level), the greater was the interest in information about the design process and real-world context. Bill further explains how for him, satisfying learning concerns understanding the work in its entirety, which means having a sense of the labour involved in the realisation of the design. Understanding the design process entails both insight into the physical processes of production, and also insight into the effort – be it intellectual and creative - of working with the brief.

Learning how much effort goes into producing these items I think is key to understanding them. (Bill)

At the outset of the research group Bill, in conversation with Karina, had differentiated between a mode of looking which is an end in itself, and a mode of looking which is in order to learn:

He's more interested in the factual side of seeing design rather than just looking at something for the sake of it. (Karina introducing Bill)

The differentiation between just looking for the sake of it and looking as a way of reading design in relation to its process and function will be explored in Chapter Five as an

important point of distinction for learning about design through the context of an exhibition.

Affective Modes of Engagement

I was so taken by the mannequins, by the film footage, by the theatrical setting ...
The exhibition took over. (Karina)

In describing how the exhibition took over, Karina's comment is striking for its language of immersion, as if her own sense of individual agency was subsumed within the experience of the visit. This idea of intimacy with the work was underlined by Bill reflecting on the importance of visual forms of interpretation in affording learning:

It's letting the work and the person 'be' in such a way where someone doesn't have to think too much but an exchange of information has happened. (Bill)

For Bill, effective learning in the exhibition should be effortless – thinking, in its most straightforward account of a state of intellectual cognition, is not the primary mode of engagement. Marnie summarised her immersive experience of being swept along by the Chalayan exhibition with repeated use of the term 'flow', describing how "you just flow through. Whether you like the work or not, it just flows". The idea of the exhibition as an immersive, non-interrupted experience was to emerge as a significant organising and conceptualising device in the semi-structured interviews. Marnie's learning journey proved to be predominantly affective, at one point the beauty of the exhibition moving her to tears: "I couldn't believe that fashion could make this beautiful spectacle. I cried, I had my face up to the glass".

Even Bill, whose primary motivation for visiting exhibitions was emphatically described as for the purpose of factual learning, found himself drawn into the exhibits imaginatively and experientially, commenting in relation to the Marloes ten Bohmer rotational injection shoe moulds in the 2009 *Designs of the Year* exhibition how he understood this work better because the visitor "could imagine putting their feet in them." (Bill)

Alongside the need to formulate a full understanding of the design process through visual prompts, participants also welcomed the opportunity to put themselves in the shoes, as it were, of the end user of the design product. Arguably, this is because function is the single most important quality of design, so exhibits that were presented to enable participants to enter into the life of the design engendered greater understanding.

Design needs context, it needs personal relevance, even if it's just being able to imagine how it works. (Rose)

The degree to which an imaginative, emotional or affective engagement was described also garnered surprise that design could impact on the visitor in this way:

The day that I came here, I was absolutely blown away. I was just on a total high. I couldn't believe it. I was just on cloud nine. (Rose)

This recalls Pekarik's on how "the museum ...offers opportunities for engagement in multiple ways, with the capacity to be intense and powerful" (2010:110). The extent to which participants engaged affectively – that is, through subjective feelings and emotions – counterbalances what Reid describes as the commonly held view that education's primary aim is cognitive understanding (Reid, 1986). Rather than a separation between learning that takes place objectively or subjectively, participants instead reveal how their learning is an amalgam of faculties of mind and of emotion, with different emphases according to the particularities of their looking. The significance of affective engagement with design in the exhibition context is further explored in Chapter Five.

Theme Two: Visitor Identity

As suggested earlier, read alongside Falk's model of 'identity-related goals', my small audience survey positions the museum as somewhat anomalous for its high proportion of visitors (76%) who cite content-related inspiration as their motivation for visiting, thereby qualifying as belonging to the smallest of Falk's categories, that of 'professional/hobbyists' (7%). In presenting data relating to visitor identity and visit motivation, I refine this category into two categories. The first I define as *extrinsic*, referring to visitors whose motivation is shaped by an explicitly stated interest in and commitment to design either professionally or through design education. The second I

define as *intrinsic*, denoting those visitors whose impetus to visit arises from individual, personal interest in design unrelated to professional or educational life. In Chapter Five I explore how extrinsic and intrinsic motivations shape the meaning-making strategies used by participants.

Extrinsic Motivation

The extrinsically-motivated visitor is neatly encapsulated by Bill whose insistence that he visits museums to learn sets an instrumentalist educational agenda from the outset (see page 89). Bill's identity as an MA automotive student shapes the experience of his visit throughout and is the dominant factor in what Falk would term his lower case 'i' identity-related motivation:

When you're browsing about as someone who does something that is very factually based, like Automotive Design, you're always looking at practicalities of things and thinking how can I make people enjoy this on a mass scale? (Bill)

Bill is representative of the bulk of the museum's visitors, who come equipped with a healthy measure of design knowledge and spend a significant proportion of their time engaged in design as either professionals or students (Audiences London, 2008/9). Whilst enjoyment and satisfaction is nonetheless derived from the exhibition experience per se, it is for the most part envisaged as a means to an end, an opportunity to contribute to educational engagement in design:

I thought I might get some ideas for fabrics or the way things go together for my car interiors, stuff like that. So, education. (Bill)

Intrinsic Motivation

The picture presented by intrinsically-motivated participants is less pronounced in terms of clear goals or intentions for the visit, again recalling Pekarik on the value of visitor studies that allow room for the unexpected dimensions of a visit (Pekarik, 2010). There is an expectation that some type of learning will take place, but the parameters are less purposive:

You're never quite sure what you're going to take on board when you get there.
(Rose)

For Karina the exhibition visit presents an opportunity to escape the everyday:

He's a young man who thinks about design his whole life. Whereas we now have to spend our time thinking what's for tea? Fish fingers, etc. (Karina)

For others, it is a chance to nurture the self:

For me, a museum is always, you're going to grow. It's that learning isn't it? You're going to come out of it with something extra, whatever that might be.
(Danielle)

As Falk and Prentice propose (Falk, 2010; Prentice, 1996), the museum visit has the capacity to endure beyond the museum walls - it is not bound in space and time. In considering their reasons for visiting the Design Museum, respondents also discussed how the exhibition visit would serve not as an end in itself but as a catalyst for further engagement, with examples given as on-going research, sharing memories of the visit with friends and recommending they visit, or even being tempted to pursue further study. In agreeing with Karina, Danielle furnished her with a response which gestures towards the importance and influence of personal life-worlds in shaping meaning-making in the museum:

You can't take it out of context. Your context and his are totally different.
(Danielle)

Personal contexts include not only the present day life of the visitor but also those prior experiences and even future imaginings of the self that bear relevance to the visit. Upon watching the short film *Temporal Meditations* (Chalayan, 2004) Rose's former professional identity working as a buyer in a fashion boutique was brought to mind, a memory which exerted a strong emotional response - and was to relate her past to her present by inspiring her to return to college to learn upholstery:

I felt like crying because it reminded me of who I used to be, my heart was pounding, I want to go home right now and find that college course. (Rose)

For Karina, the past evoked by engagement with an exhibit was equally powerful. In describing her experience in the *After Words* installation, she pithily encapsulated her response as “I was moved by it”. *After Words* (Autumn/Winter 2000) was originally a performance piece, presented in the exhibition as a static installation accompanied by a film of the live performance. The installation was designed to evoke a modernist living-room, comprising elegant fabric-covered armchairs and a simple coffee table made of concentric circles of wood. Slowly, as the film progressed, each of the objects in the room was revealed to be dual purpose. Models entered the room and began to clothe themselves: the chair covers became outer garments, the chair frames folded to become suitcases, and the circular coffee table cascaded into a skirt, with the central ring the waistband and the ever-increasing concentric circles falling below as interlinked horizontal panels. The interpretation booklet offered the following explanation of the piece:

After Words was inspired by the plight of the refugee and the horror of having to leave one's home suddenly in times of war. Chalayan took his inspiration from observing how Turkish Cypriots, including members of his own family, were subjected to ethnic cleansing in Cyprus prior to 1974 when the country was divided. The collection explored the idea of how, when confronted by such an ordeal, people want to hide their possessions or carry them on departure. (Chalayan booklet, fig. F)

In discussion Karina recounted a tale from her family history. Her mother, a Polish Jew growing up in the aftermath of the Second World War, had left Poland as a child under the guardianship of a family friend, to pursue a new life in England. Arriving with only the coat on her back, it transpired that her guardian had, ingeniously, sewn several of the child's clothes into the lining of her coat. The garment had, in effect, become a suitcase. This personal and cultural history meant that *After Words* exerted a potent and sustained personal interest and engagement for Karina. She described how initially she explored the work by studying and puzzling over its various components, until she arrived at a moment of recognition that changed her mode of engagement with the work. This was the moment of realisation why all the models wore flat shoes (a detail unnoticed by the other participants), in reference to sure-footedness in the event of fleeing home. With this insight, the individual parts of *After Words* coalesced and the overarching theme of the piece became evident. Through contributing the personal and the cultural to her

meaning-making process, she moved from a mode of engagement that was primarily one of intellectual cognition, concerned with piecing together the parts of a puzzle, to a mode of engagement that was predominantly affective. In this affective mode, personal memories evoked a deeply-felt emotional response to the piece in which she expressed a sense of validation, as her cultural history was evoked. This was coupled with surprise that something as seemingly separate from day to day life as haute-couture fashion could dovetail with her own life history.

I didn't expect to make a connection between what I thought would be high-end fashion and the real world, my world. (Karina)

The role of personal context in meaning-making is considered in greater depth in Chapter Five with reference to the hermeneutics of Dilthey and Gadamer. Karina's experience in *After Words* called her personal and cultural history to the forefront of her experience at the museum. It also provided a sense of validation through recognising aspects of this history as a shared experience, thereby positioning her as part of another interpretive community besides that of the research group. The notion of an interpretive community is formulated by Hooper-Greenhill and Fish with an emphasis on members' shared meaning-making strategies (Fish, 2006: Hooper-Greenhill, 1999).

Theme Three: Exhibition Design

Marnie's account of the exhibition design in *From Fashion to Back* captures the variety of display languages used in this exhibition. Her experience of a diverse range of spatial and sensorial environments complements and extends the exhibits, cohering to elicit an overall celebratory and affectively-engaged response.

The museum's done brilliantly - there's written information, there's visual information, you might have a film, you might have the product in front of you, things are hanging from the ceiling, things are hanging on the walls, things are right in front of you ... you're walking around a big space, you're walking around a small space, it's light, it's dark. (Marnie)

Karina's reaction to the exhibition design attributes it active agency in shaping her journey through the exhibition:

I love the way they used confined places, the way you suddenly found yourself drawn to an area. The use of light was very good, sometimes you'd find yourself in a light area, then suddenly it's very dark. (Karina)

Similarly for Danielle and Bill, the exhibition design actively sustained and provoked their on-going interest, being experienced as a journey into the unknown:

That was the thing about that exhibition - you were looking at one of the figures and out of the corner of your eye you could see down the corridor and see what you were going to come up to and some of the imagery was really dramatic, really stunning and interesting. (Danielle)

All the little signals kept me interested even though I didn't really know what was going on. (Bill)

It is notable how the exhibition design enabled Bill, whom we have seen earlier to set great store in factual, intellectually cognitive engagement with exhibitions, to feel comfortable with 'not knowing' as an aspect of his exhibition experience.

The sense of theatre and drama evoked in participants by the exhibition design in *From Fashion and Back* was also described in relation to the use of mannequins throughout. These mannequins were commissioned and designed for the exhibition. They were not shop type mannequins but instead evoked an individuated, life-size woman. The mannequins were further individuated through their design as engaged in various activities throughout the exhibition, including in one room painting the circular walls of the space from white to black (figure 4b), as if frozen in the act of preparing for the exhibition, in another sitting on a swing drinking tea, in a third brandishing a pair of scissors as if to continue pattern cutting the very garment being worn (figure 4c), and in a fourth, as if watching one of the video exhibits. These mannequins elicited a phenomenological response from participants, who on coming literally 'face-to-face' with them, found them to exert a powerful influence, with Bill and Rose respectively describing how "There's this mannequin right in the centre, staring at you, and it draws you in" and how "the mannequins sort of absorbed you into the work... it was very sensual as well".

Rose's description of herself as becoming part of the work evokes the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty on the bodily engagement of the painter as an intertwining of vision and

movement in the act of painting: “I live in it from the inside. I am immersed in it” (Merleau Ponty in Johnson, 1993).

The notion of the immersive exhibition as a way of shaping visitor experience was to prove fruitful in the curatorial interviews. The relationship between the design and staging of the mannequins brought the artifice of the exhibition design to the fore, whilst at the same time contributing to an overall immersive or absorbing experience for the visitor. The exhibition design was experienced by Marnie as much as a part of the exhibition content as the garments themselves. Just as participants had sought further and deeper visual insights into the design process as part of exhibition interpretation particularly in relation to *Designs of the Year 2009*, so too both Marnie and Bill were stimulated to learn more about the back story of the Chalayan exhibition:

I'd like to hear the voice of the curator a little more on the challenges of making this exhibition...a little insight on what went on behind closed doors to actually come up with this beautiful exhibit. It's part of the exhibit. (Marnie)

I would have been interested to see the patterns for the dresses, perhaps even more than the finished articles in a way. Because process is so interesting, even if it's just a snapshot overview. (Bill)

The question of how to present design process for the visitor, and its role in enabling learning, will also be seen to occupy curators.

The main ideas about learning in the design exhibition, arising from the Visitor Research Group, can be summarised as follows:

1. Respondents characterised their learning with visual and affective dimensions as well as intellectual dimensions.
2. Visitor learning is motivated extrinsically and intrinsically, based on personal context and narratives.
3. Exhibition design influences learning and is regarded by some visitors as on a footing with the exhibition content per se.

iii) Semi-structured Interviews with Curators at the Design Museum

In this section I present data concerning how exhibition curators at the Design Museum envisage exhibitions to enable learning for adult visitors. In order to distinguish curators from visitor research group respondents, the four curatorial respondents are identified alphabetically as Curators A, B, C and D. Brief information on curator's academic backgrounds was given on page 67. I structured the interviews around topics intended to elicit a wide-ranging discussion, such that the subject of exhibitions as environments for learning might be explored as broadly as possible. The discussion topics were:

- Professional motivation
- The meaning of design
- Ingredients for a successful exhibition at the Design Museum
- The ideal-type exhibition visit
- Challenges in curating design
- The future for design exhibitions

The following themes emerged from the interviews, and provide my framework for data presentation:

Theme One: the Character of Design Exhibitions

- Purpose
- Exhibition Design

Theme Two: the Ideal Visit

- Education
- Experience

Theme Three: Curating Design

- Shifts in Curatorial Practice
- New Professional Identities

*Theme One: the Character of Design Exhibitions*Purpose

Curators present the purpose of exhibitions at the Design Museum as twofold.

Exhibitions enact and realise institutional mission in physical and authoritative form:

The exhibition shows things that this particular museum knows more about than others - which are to do with the identity and authority of the particular museum, which has very strong links with the core mission statement of the museum.
(Curator D)

In doing so, exhibitions aim to involve the visitor discursively in debates about the meaning and role of design. This is the second purpose of design exhibitions: to enable the visitor to engage with debates about the role of design today.

For the Design Museum in particular there is such a rich variety of different definitions of design that the museum has to offer that conversation to the visitor - not necessarily to choose a definition but to offer the conversation as part of the context for the exhibitions. (Curator D)

It is our responsibility to show how design is evolving, to start a conversation with our visitors, to address the dialogues about, and within design. (Curator C)

The exhibition is both conversational catalyst and discursive hub, a vehicle that “stimulates that desire to learn” (Curator A) through the direct encounter with design. As a site of encounter, exhibitions provide unique opportunities for visitors to enter the world of design, offering something that cannot be gained elsewhere and opening up new perspectives on design:

It's about being able to get up close. Rare film footage, interviews - they add a whole other dimension: they give unique and important insights into the designer and their work. (Curator A)

In this encounter, depth of engagement is achieved through a focus on the processes of design, and breadth through a contextualisation of the object in relation to its wider socio-cultural impact. The twin facets of depth and breadth in the presentation of design are

neatly encapsulated in Curator D's description of the museum as both of design and of designing and by Curator B who summarises the display of design as the use of objects for big ideas.

The notion of the exhibition encounter as a mode of communication introduces the metaphor of the exhibition as narrative:

Design is a much more complicated field than we like to let out, so because you don't want to bombard people, you create a narrative for them, you're not spoon feeding but you're helping the visitor get insight about the ethos of the designer. So the exhibition is like a little essay. (Curator B)

No magnum opus, the exhibition as narrative is highly selective, a story with a variety of plots, none of which are pursued exhaustively. Exhibitions are intended to offer insights into particular aspects of a designer's oeuvre (if the exhibition is monographic) or on those trends and debates deemed significant by the curator (in the case of a survey or thematic exhibition). However, these are not comprehensively pursued. This is not the monograph realised in material form, nor is it the over-arching retrospective. Selectivity forms part of the discretionary judgement of the curator:

An exhibition is just providing a layer – to say 'this is the whole picture' would be wrong – an exhibition is just an interpretation. (Curator B)

You have the opportunity to focus on process, how the designer works, where their inspiration comes from, how they work with the manufacturer, the producer ...there are so many different facets to it. (Curator A)

In describing the exhibition as like a little essay (Curator B) the earlier etymological meaning of the word springs to mind, in terms of an essay as an attempt, an experiment, a proposition about design that is made to the visitor for their critical response, as Curator C states: "It offers viewpoints - you can choose to agree or disagree". However, the notion of the exhibition as propositional, rather than expository or didactic, does not militate against clear structure, cogency and coherence.

You've got to tell a very coherent story. It's about making the concept behind the show understandable to the visitor... You can make connections between exhibits. (Curator A)

When telling a story, or proposing a variety of viewpoints on design, textual interpretation is treated with a light touch, perceived as ancillary to the visual, spatial and sensory aspects of exhibition design. Written text is seen as an alternative way in to the displayed object for the visitor, but is used sparingly. Curator D identifies a potentially adverse effect of written text as introducing a note of interruption into an experience of the exhibition intended to be one of flow, a key term which is explored in my analysis:

Data can be a bit staccato. I am always aware that if our exhibitions get too bitty and too 'museumy' they lose that main role where the 2D and 3D inform the visitor of the designers' ethos. If you get too 'peg boardy' you actually lose the message. (Curator B)

Similarly, Curator C adopts a light touch to interpretation across the exhibition as a whole in order to engender in-depth and sustained looking, recognising the importance of visual tools in conveying information about the brief, the process, the function and impact of the exhibit.

You don't want to overload the audience with information so you pick key pieces that you feel need more interpretation in order to give a richer picture of how the work has come about, or why is it there, what does it do? And from there on it's about picking methods about the best visual way of conveying these ideas... as opposed to long textual descriptions. (Curator C)

Exhibition Design

The question of how the different elements of an exhibition work together is understood by curators as the preserve of exhibition design, which actively works to complement and strengthen the content of the exhibition. In reflecting on the role, dimensions and intended effects of exhibition design, curators conceive exhibitions as whole, coherent entities, rather than as a presentation of a sequence of individuated visitor engagements with separate works. Exhibition design plays a vital role in conveying meaning and shaping visitors' experience in the exhibition. The typologically specific character of the Design Museum places the spatial and graphic design of a temporary exhibition on a par

with the subject of the exhibition, such that for Curator B, the exhibition is viewed in its entirety as a work of design:

Visitors see the exhibition as a design in itself. (Curator B)

For Curator A, the integrated relationship between the subject of an exhibition – the ‘what’ - and the exhibition design – the ‘how’ – attributes exhibition design a crucial role in promoting the aesthetic dimension of design:

The power of exhibition design is to convey the designer's aesthetic. (Curator A)

Additionally, exhibition design is attributed with considerable agency in enriching and extending exhibition content:

I use the environment to convey my argument, to reinforce the notion of the exhibition. (Curator B)

While this is not to accord equal status to exhibition design as to the subject of the exhibition proper, nor is it to allocate exhibition design an entirely subsidiary status. Rather, the relationship between exhibition design and exhibition content is more finely nuanced and interconnected, and as I will propose in Chapter Five, arises from the specific history of exhibition design under the Bauhaus.

A variety of reasons are cited as to why exhibition design is accorded such consideration. The pragmatic reason is that temporary exhibitions are more likely to attract one off visits as opposed to repeated visits to a permanent collection. This being the case, exhibition design needs to play a particularly active role in the overall communication of the exhibition:

As mostly people will only come once, it's being able to convey that ethos, that collective experience, in one go. (Curator B)

A second reason concerns the typologically specific character of the Design Museum. Recalling the earlier notion of the exhibition as an experiment or a proposition, Curator B suggests that the emphasis on innovative exhibition design sits within the museum's

remit to showcase cutting-edge design practice. That is, the exhibition design is as much an area of development within the field of design as the content of exhibitions:

As the Design Museum we need to show that we are on our toes and we are pushing things visually. (Curator B)

A third reason relates to the audience demographic in which 66% percentage either practice or study design (Audiences London 2008/9). For this audience, exhibition design holds appeal because it is seen as a discreet field of design practice. Furthermore the emphasis on visual and spatial engagement is apposite for an audience for whom learning preferences are understood to be more visual than textual, a quality well understood by the exhibition designers:

Graphic designers with a lot of exhibition experience are really valuable contributors to the curating process -over and above the technical side they are creative and they have a great visual understanding of how things are read beyond the text itself. (Curator C)

We work with 2D and 3D designers who help to interpret what we're trying to get across in a much more emotional, visceral, sensory way. I think a lot of our visitors come here for that. They're not necessarily great readers. (Curator B)

The integrated approach to 3D and 2D exhibition design situates it as integral to the interpretation of an exhibition, alongside those aspects of exhibitions more commonly associated with interpretation such as wall labels and audio guides and realised across visual, spatial, environmental and sensory forms of design. The Design Museum's current kunsthalle model of a rolling programme of temporary exhibitions also places greater emphasis on exhibition design as each exhibition is conceived uniquely, and needs to be clearly differentiated from all other exhibitions that constitute the programme. In summary, the key characteristics of design exhibitions from the perspectives of curator respondents are as follows:

- Exhibitions deliver institutional mission to visitors
- Exhibitions provide visitors with an encounter with design that is conversational and propositional
- Exhibition design actively complements and enriches exhibition content
- Exhibition design promotes visual forms of engagement with design

Theme Two: the Ideal Visit

This theme presents data arising from curators' descriptions of the 'ideal' visit to an exhibition at the Design Museum. Responses formulated two broad categories of visitor: the specialist, 'design literate' visitor, conceived of as either working in or studying design (referred to by Curator C as the design community) and the generalist visitor who brings with them a large measure of interest and enthusiasm for the subject of design but less specialist design knowledge. Significantly, when describing the multi-dimensional character of an exhibition visit, Curator A places particular emphasis on the visit as an opportunity for learning:

An exhibition can be many things - education, entertainment, experience - but you always hope that visitors will learn something new about design. (Curator A)

The differentiation between education and experience was to pervade curators' accounts of the 'ideal-type' visit. A dichotomy was broadly drawn between emotional (affective) engagement and educational (intellectual) engagement with design. Importantly however, the differentiation between education and experience was not considered to be mutually exclusive, but as arising from and rooted in the different facets of design:

There are two sides to design, the everyday and then the more intriguing, inspirational, almost mystical side which makes it an experience in itself. (Curator C)

While in many respects the differentiation between affective and intellectual cognition is a false dichotomy, an issue further discussed in Chapter Five, the extent to which it was used as an organising device by curators is noteworthy, and as such provides an apposite structure for data presentation as below.

Education

For curators, the educational dimension of the exhibition visit concerns the development of knowledge about design, designing and the multiple contexts which form design and within which design operates. This dimension centres on the design object, the encounter

with which gives rise to new understandings and perspectives on the role of design in everyday life. In this the notion of connection between exhibit and visitor is vital.

The everyday life elements are where you have objects that connect people to things that they deal with on a daily basis. All the Designs of the Year projects are relevant, they link into people's lives and make it a tangible experience. (Curator C)

Education is manifest as the formulation of critical appreciation, perceived to take place as visitors engage with the complexity of the object in a range of contexts, uppermost of which is the design context. Instances of complexity given by curators were those relating to the design process, to the problem a particular design sets out to address, and to the situation a design is intended to bring about. In formulating a critical response, the issue is not the extent to which the visitor either likes or dislikes an exhibit, but rather, whether they come away with a fuller understanding of the work in its design context. The question of critical engagement with design was to account for the differentiation between a visit made by a design community audience and that of the general non-specialist visitor, with Curator C describing how “the professional designer ... is knowledgeable about the creative industries and will come in with a much more critical eye” (Curator C).

Nonetheless, the role of the museum in garnering debate and offering the visitor a critically engaged conversation about design is not restricted to the specialist. As Curator C continues, the ideal visit is one in which every visitor walks away with an opinion. The educational dimension of the visit has at its centre the design object, which is considered to be rich in potential meanings:

The importance of the encounter with the design object is to do with the question of what kind of society produces a thing like this? And through that question you can see how advanced society is, the values of that society, some of the economic conditions of that society - it provides access to technology, society and culture through any object. (Curator D)

When I see objects I see the personal, how it was used, its life within it, and then I see its cultural story, where it was made, how it affected what it looked like, who made it. I see multiple stories when I look at objects. (Curator B)

The learning envisaged to take place by curators attributes primacy to learning about the design process, through the encounter with the object in the exhibition and through the careful use of a range of complementary interpretive materials. The encounter needs to move beyond a formal reading of the object, and one strategy is afford the visitor insight into the exhibit in its everyday context.

A lot of it is to do with process – that's not to say you have to go through a series of bullet points or drawings about how it's made, but it's something about understanding an object beyond its aesthetics. (Curator C)

The stories elucidated through the encounter with the object in the exhibition context all contribute to the formulation of visitor opinion. Stories given particular value are those relating to the design process, to the role of the object in everyday life and to the impact and significance of the object in its broader socio-cultural context. Curator B gives an example:

The manufacturing context tells us more about society and the object's place in society. It's important to provide this kind of detail when possible, because information affects your judgement of something. (Curator B)

Crucially however, and recalling the caution with which curators approach the role of written text in the exhibition design and interpretation, the object itself is accorded primacy of position in stimulating learning, when it is judiciously displayed with care taken to selection and arrangement.

A good learning experience is where you are seduced to spend more time than you planned, and you start unravelling layers of meaning. For example, one of the nicest traditional design museum displays is the Alte Pinakothek in Munich where the curator puts 3 things up on a shelf - a kettle, a radio, a clock - and there will be some affinity in the shape, the character, the material - but you're not told these layers - you unravel them yourself. For me the museum is about that situation. (Curator D)

The educational dimension of the museum visit is understood to engage the visitor actively in meaning-making through curatorial strategies of display, which make propositions about the objects through inviting the visitor to undertake a comparative reading. The exhibition is not proffered as an educational end in itself, but rather as the catalyst to further research and learning:

It's important to extend the experience of the exhibition, for example through the catalogue, commissioning a series of contributors who have knowledge in the field and can offer additional information or a new viewpoint. (Curator C)

Experience

The second dimension of the ideal visit described by curators is that of the visit as experience. The term experience is used to denote a visit that engenders affective, rather than intellectual, registers of cognition, described by Curator A as arising from an immersive, emotional engagement and by Curator C as garnering a sensory response to the exhibition:

The best exhibition in my view is one where a visitor enters, perhaps not knowing a great deal about the subject areas, moves on through their journey and finds themselves completely inspired, motivated, have learned something new and want to find out more, and have had an emotional engagement with the exhibition. (Curator A)

...it's about waking up their senses to design, introducing them to a way of looking at design. (Curator C)

In accounting for the visit as experience, exhibition design plays a fundamental role:

Exhibition design and interpretation are key to the process of creating an experience, the power of experience over explanation. (Curator A)

In common with the educational dimension of the visit, experiential engagement takes place when connections are made between the visitor and the object. The process of learning is perceived to take place through facilitating visitors to make connections between exhibits, curatorial narratives and visitors' own responses, enabling "moments where you look beyond the object, and visitors make connections for themselves" (Curator B). While these connections cannot be second-guessed by curators, their dimensions are perceived to operate primarily in the realm of feelings, as opposed to critical or intellectual connections, and emerge from the way in which humans "imbue objects with emotion" (Curator B).

The recognition of the potential for an emotional connection between visitor and exhibit is not the preserve of the visitor, but also characterises aspects of curatorial practice:

Curating exhibitions is about selecting works based on a feeling for a piece of work. (Curator C)

Affording space and time for the contemplative moment is regarded as an important facet of the visitor experience, in which an understanding of the design process behind an object and its aesthetic can be appreciated together:

You want to give each object that moment of contemplation ...it's a moment to think about the effort and thought that goes into the simplest of things. It's a bit of beauty – you want people to appreciate how beauty can be mass produced and simple. (Curator B)

The act of displaying the mass-produced design object in the exhibition context invests the object with cultural status and value that elevates it from its commonplace, everyday context. The contemplative moment invites visitors to engage with design both in relation to the design process behind the object and also as an object with aesthetic appeal. For curators, a synthesis of both is needed to appreciate the design object fully. The visual qualities of exhibition design and content are accorded particular agency in generating the notion of the exhibition as experience:

We have a lot of visitors who would rarely look at a caption but would instead get a visual high from the experience of the exhibition. (Curator B)

The ideal visit comprises a combination of affective, aesthetic engagement and knowledge development, brought together through the exhibition design which offers to the visitor a form of visual narrative:

You want the visual punch because that is what we do here – that wins people over. But it would be wrong if you didn't offer any sense of context, of history. (Curator B)

Thus the visual, immersive experience is not an end in itself. Rather it is perceived as a way of drawing the visitor into the exhibition in order to facilitate a deeper and more

satisfactory engagement that will engender learning. A curatorial impetus is revealed as the desire to align affective engagement with the transformative moment of learning.

You can only go so far with an immersive experience - you can't answer the question of the work's significance. This is where the range of interpretive tools comes into play - introductory text, film footage - all these tools help the visitor come to a fuller understanding of the work. (Curator A)

You get a visual hit but also that lovely kind of giddiness because you think 'I'm really learning something profound here', about people, society, the general, the specific, the intellectual as well as the everyday and the functional. (Curator B)

In summary, the Ideal Visit from the perspectives of curator respondents is one in which:

- learning is a core component, with primacy afforded insight into design process and the development of critical opinions about design
- intellectual and affective modes of engagement are stimulated
- the status of everyday, commonplace design is elevated

Theme Three: Curating Design

Shifts in Curatorial Practice

Respondents' accounts of the ideal visit position the curator, exhibition content and the nominal visitor (be they specialist or generalist) in what might be described as a 'virtuous triangle'. In this triangle, the curator strives to hold in balance what they perceive is their primary responsibility to the subject of the exhibition with a commitment to creating an exhibition that will prove intellectually and emotionally accessible and compelling to visitors:

We have responsibilities as curators to the visitor ... to draw that visitor into the exhibition, to keep them there, and to offer them an experience. (Curator A)

However, while curators acknowledge their responsibility to visitors, it is not the primary driver when curating an exhibition:

The driver of the exhibition remains with the work itself. If you lose sight of that, you will dilute the messages and that will impact on the visitor experience. (Curator A)

The audience is not there immediately. My first responsibility is to the content, and the way we show it. Once you get to grips with whatever we are going to show, that's when you start formulating ideas about the exhibition designer and how the audience will understand it. (Curator C)

The increasing attention to audience engagement is described as a core characteristic of a new form of curatorial practice, arising in response to visitors who have become increasingly knowledgeable and discerning in their expectations and consumption of culture and to economic conditions and the growth of the entertainment industry:

The role of the curator has changed dramatically over the last ten years. Museums have become much more commercial, there is increasing competition from other leisure destinations, there is a need to increase visitor numbers, and audiences are now more sophisticated, demanding more from an exhibition. (Curator A)

The attention devoted to visitor experience is seen as a new model of curating and is favourably compared by respondents with notions of traditional curating, in which the pursuit and enactment of object connoisseurship excludes consideration of audience:

The old model is the curator who goes into such a minutiae of detail, who doesn't think - or necessarily care - about their audience, but only about what interests them. (Curator A)

The traditional curator for me was very much the old fashioned conservation sort of person. Curating today is more ideas-driven. (Curator C)

New approaches to curating do not entirely displace those characteristics that curators considered as more traditional. Certain aspects are retained and regarded as fundamental to the practice of curating. One such is a consideration for the object, especially when in the exhibition context.

The curator has to be the person looking after the objects and making sure they're not overwhelmed by the exhibition design. (Curator B)

New Professional Identities

Conceptions of the new approaches to curating raised by respondents resulted in a rich array of accounts of professional identity. These included curator as director of content; as mediator, between different stakeholders involved in making exhibitions; as animateur, using interpretive tools to bring the exhibition to life; as co-producer, working in partnership with exhibition designers, and, lastly, as the catalyst for visitors to enjoy a learning experience in the exhibition.

Significantly for my study, with the exception of curator as co-producer, each of the proposed new professional identities resulting from accounts of shifting curating practices revolves around the relationship between the curator and the visitor.

In drawing Chapter Four to a close, I suggest that the significance of my data resides in the extent to which respondents demonstrate shared perspectives on learning in the exhibition context at the Design Museum despite being differently motivated (for visitors, arising from personal context and narratives, and for curators, arising from a professional disciplinary focus). This is particularly notable given the extensive research project undertaken by the Getty and referenced in Chapter Two: Literature Review, which revealed a striking disjunction between visitor experience and curator perception.

The shared perspectives on learning expressed by my respondents relate to the role of exhibitions, how learning is enabled within exhibitions and the extent to which that learning is specific to the Design Museum. The detail of these shared perspectives is the subject of Chapter Five: Data Analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter explores and analyses the data presented in Chapter Four, in response to the following research questions:

How can learning be characterised through the context of an exhibition visit?

To what extent is this characterisation of learning distinctive to the Design Museum?

My analysis adopts the three clusters of ideas that emerged as a framework in Chapter Two: Literature Review. These ideas are, respectively, the ACTIVE museum, the ENGAGING museum, and the DISTINCTIVE museum. A short précis of each is presented below.

The ACTIVE museum

This idea arises from the notion of the expository agency of the museum exhibition as active progenitor of visitors' learning. It is rooted in conceptions of the educational role of the museum that can be traced back to the earliest public museums.

The ENGAGING museum

This idea refines the educational role of the museum in relation to those characteristics of independent learning understood to be most salient in the context of a museum visit by an independent adult visitor. These characteristics are concerned with learning which draws the visitor into a process of transformation, encompassing prior life experiences, motivations and expectations, and intellectual and affective cognitive registers. The engaging museum places explicit value on engendering learning as part of the experience of a visit.

The DISTINCTIVE museum

This idea relates to the notion of museums as institutions that engender learning shaped by the typologically specific character of a particular 'family' of museums. From the perspective of the Design Museum's disciplinary context of design, there emerges an emphasis on the disciplinary distinctiveness of design in respect of its history, theory and practice.

My data analysis adopts these themes to draw upon and weave across all of my data, rather than treating each section separately according to the data gathering method and presentation. This enables the identification of shared perspectives between visitors and curators, and the detailing of disjunctions where they arise. In formulating a conceptualisation of learning in the context of an exhibition visit at the Design Museum, my endeavour is to propose an inclusive concept that holds relevance both for visitors and for curators, drawing on shared perspectives. In so doing, it must be acknowledged that exhibitions are neither neutral nor generic environments for display. Literature on the political agency of the temporary exhibition as a mode of display is extensive. It encompasses a complex and overlapping set of concerns ranging from historical accounts of the formation of the temporary exhibition as a mode of display (Bennett, 1995; McClellan, 1994 & 2003; Pointon, 1994), to forms of staging, spectacle and showmanship (Greenberg, Ferguson & Nairne, 1995;) to ideological questions of curatorial practice and the nexus of power relations between institution, exhibition content and audience (Marincola, 2007; Bal, 1996; Karp & Lavine, 1990).

Significantly, within this extensive literature, critical attention to the history, languages and ideologies of displaying contemporary design is brief, certainly when compared to the body of scholarship concerning exhibiting contemporary art (Jeppsson, 2010). One might cautiously surmise that scholarship regarding both the historical background for, and contemporary approaches towards curating design in the temporary exhibition mode is a nascent yet fertile field largely to be found in exhibition catalogues and research degrees, and only now growing into the kind of self-awareness that Walker describes as a necessary part of the process of the emergence of a discipline, manifest through publication, teaching and scholarly presentation at conference (Walker, 1984).

i) The Design Museum as the Active Museum

The notion of the Active Museum presents the following propositions on the expository agency of exhibitions at the Design Museum in enabling learning, each of which are discussed below.

1. The Active Museum engages visitors in debate about the role and future of design.

2. The Active Museum endorses design as culturally significant by relocating design from its everyday context and re-presenting it in order to foster critical and aesthetic appreciation.

3. The Active Museum experiments with new approaches to curating design which are predominantly public-facing.

1. The Active Museum involves visitors in debate about the role and future of design.

The way we present design at the Design Museum is about its impact, about the power of design to improve our lives, the way in which design operates in our lives - it could be a new aesthetic, process or working with a new material. In a way, design has always been about the future. The designer is at the start of the chain of events. (Curator A)

By positioning itself at the vanguard of its field, the Design Museum exploits the temporary exhibition as the primary vehicle for presenting debates about the role and significance of design, and showcasing potential futures in design. The temporary nature of the exhibition can be more responsive and attuned to developments in design practice than the permanent collection display, demonstrated by Curator C's account of how nominations for the *Designs of the Year* exhibition, held annually at the museum, shifted significantly from 2008 to 2009 in their weighting towards the sustainable design agenda, reflecting trends within design.

Designs of the Year is about key events that bring current design issues to the forefront. The museum should be able to say, with confidence, there are all these things happening in design, and in this show we are addressing these particular issues, and we want you to think about them too. (Curator C)

In this regard, the Active Museum is propositional. It promotes and provokes dialogue and discourse on design, utilising not only the exhibition as a catalyst for debate but also the public programme as a core constituent in involving its public in thinking about the role, impact and influence of design. The museum is not concerned to promote itself as a singular authority on its subject, but rather to act as a catalyst or hub for critical engagement with design by the lay public and by the design community. The *Designs of the Year* exhibition exemplifies this approach. Exhibits are nominated by an external panel of design specialists drawn from industry, academia and journalism. In so doing

the Active Museum positions itself as a platform for design which embraces multiple specialist voices rather than promoting its own institutional perspective. Through the exhibition blog, the public is also invited to cast their vote for the winning design, in a technologically updated version of the Museum of Modern Art's visitor poll for *Machine Art* (1934), discussed below. Thus the Active Museum extends its reach by inviting the design community and the general public to make value judgements about its content, constituting design as a critical force in today's complex world and locating itself as a protagonist in the field of design. Extending the reach of the museum is not an exercise in brand-building but part of the Active Museum's commitment to public engagement, raising the status of design and awareness of its importance in every-day life.

The notion of the Active Museum described by Curator A situates the museum at the forefront of its discipline, spotting and showcasing trends that both represent, and progress, the field of design, from the most spectacular and complex to the more modest and unassuming. Looking ahead and outside itself does not mean that the Design Museum is a museum of prototypes nor that it eschews the territory of design history, with its focus on design as the work of significant creative individuals (Conway, 1995; McDermott, 2005; Naylor, 1990 [1971]; Pevsner, 2005 [1936]; Sparke 2008 [1986], Walker, 1989). Rather, the work of key figures in twentieth-century design history is selected for exhibition on the basis of contemporary influence and legacy, its role in contributing to key moments of innovation, or as catalysts for future development in the discipline of design. For example, Curator A ascribed the rationale for the selection of Hussein Chalayan in the temporary exhibition programme as primarily arising from his innovative combination of materials and technologies in fashion design.

Whilst affording historical perspectives on design on the basis of influence and legacy, the Active Museum provides a counterpoint to what might be considered traditional understandings of the museum concept. Such understandings imagine the museum as repository and keeper of histories and of cultures, reified through the collection and display of objects, a place of connoisseurship and expertise, of study and display, with an implied commitment to stasis (Knell et al, 2007:xix). For some this stasis betokens the death knell for museums. From the clarion call of Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto of 1909, with its fulmination on museums as "mausoleums, cemeteries of empty exertion, Calvaries of crucified dreams, registries of aborted beginnings!" (Huxley & Witts,

1996:252) to later criticism of museums as attic-like spaces in which the object is deracinated and “made mute by the act of museumifying” (Harbison, 1988:31), the museum is not traditionally considered as an active environment for progressing a discipline. Yet the museum concept is constantly in flux, as scholarship in the field of museum studies attests (Hein, H., 2000; Knell et al, 2007; Marstine, 2006; Vergo, 1989). It deftly eschews fixed definitions to keep pace with external contexts, be they in the fields of practice that constitute the typological specificity of the museum, or related political, economic or social contexts (Schubert, 2000). In this way, the Design Museum as the Active Museum contributes to the ever-expanding concept of the museum.

2. The Active Museum endorses design as culturally significant by relocating design from its everyday context and re-presenting it in order to foster critical and aesthetic appreciation.

By exhibiting design in the museum context, the Active Museum affords otherwise commonplace objects a moment of contemplation and appreciation which raises the status of design from the everyday and invests it with cultural value. This recalls the pioneering work of the American librarian and museum director John Cotton Dana, whose arguments for the museum’s founding principles of engagement, education and public access included advocacy for the beauty of the everyday (Meecham and Sheldon, 2009). Criticizing snobbery, Dana asserted that “beauty bears no relation to age, rarity, or price” (Ford, 2006:2). To encourage recognition and enjoyment of beauty in commonplace things, and as the antecedent of Industrial Facility’s *Under a Fiver* exhibition at the Design Museum in 2008, he once exhibited well-designed pottery that he had procured from a five-and ten-cent store, proudly announcing that not a single piece had cost more than twenty-five cents (Ford, op.cit).

The Active Museum invites the visitor to consider design anew, removed from its everyday context and re-presented through the display languages of the museum exhibition.

You want to give each object that moment of contemplation ...it’s a moment to think about the effort and thought that goes into the simplest of things. It’s a bit of beauty – you want people to appreciate how beauty can be mass-produced and simple. (Curator B)

Design is endorsed as culturally significant, invested with what the first director of the Design Museum described as “cultural gravitas” (Bayley, 2007). In a reversal of Benjamin’s thesis that technology puts pay to the individuated and unique aura of the work of art (Benjamin, W. in Harrison & Wood, 1992), a thesis that nonetheless saw the potential for manifold progressive possibilities in the loss of aura, the Active Museum might be said to ‘auratise’ the everyday, reframing design for contemplative and aesthetic consideration. I explore the nature of the aesthetic when looking at design in the exhibition context later in this chapter, in relation to the Design Museum as the Distinctive Museum. Given design’s dominant *raison d’être* in mass production and utility, the exhibition mode is attributed agency in enabling this reframing, affording visitors new and unexpected ways to encounter design, “waking up their senses to design, introducing them to a way of looking at design.” (Curator C)

Crucially, by auratising design the Active Museum does not set out to divorce form from function nor render the design object autonomous, a common display practice in many museums. Instead, it maintains an embedded relationship with its real-world context through modes of display and interpretation. In the exhibitions referenced in my research, this relationship is illustrated in respondents’ references to the inclusion of catwalk footage in *From Fashion and Back*, and in the display of the rotational moulds for Marloes Ten Bohmer’s shoe designs in *Designs of the Year 2009*. In this way, the production, manufacturing and functional qualities of design are attributed value and status on a par with aesthetic appreciation. Curator B describes the aim of such a curatorial approach to exhibit the object as “living, not performing”, recalling Bill on the importance of fully gauging how a design is conceived and produced in order fully to appreciate its formal qualities:

People are interested in design because of the factual: you are brought closer to the work because of the interest in the facts - and then you are amazed by the visuals.

In endorsing design, the Active Museum inculcates a conceptual transformation of the design object from its everyday context to that of creative, generative and aesthetic object, expressed by Curator C as the two sides to design:

the everyday and then the more intriguing, aesthetic, almost mystical side which makes it an experience in itself. The exhibition has to look at both. (Curator C)

The application of the temporary exhibition as a vehicle to reframe design, invest it with something of the auratic status of the art object and promote public participation finds its antecedent in Philip Johnson's curatorial endeavour to transpose industrial design into autonomous aesthetic art works in the 1934 *Machine Art* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. In this exhibition, machine-made objects such as springs, laboratory appliances, engines, tools, furniture and even a ball bearing were presented within a three-storey exhibition whose installation design emphasized the formal qualities of the objects and encouraged visual engagement with each object on an individuated basis (Staniszewski, 1999: 66 – 72). However, a note of caution is necessary in reading *Machine Art* solely for its privileging of the formal, expressive qualities of the design object. While many of the exhibits were placed on pedestals like sculptures or under glass cases like rare objets d'art, commensurate attention was nonetheless paid to the industrial and commercial contexts for these works through interpretive text in an accompanying booklet, and to affording the visitor a participatory mode of engagement to complement the visual.

Like *Designs of the Year* today, *Machine Art* actively fostered visitor engagement and dialogue through a visitor poll and competition to decide the best of the exhibits. By so doing it destabilized the myth of timeless beauty proposed in Johnson's exhibition catalogue, which opened with a quote from Plato celebrating the idea of universal beauty, with the aim of providing a philosophical framing for readings of the objects. On one hand, through its installation design the exhibition promoted the idea of beauty as a timeless universal concept based on the Platonic theory of Form (Hayward, Cardinal and Jones, 2007:70). On the other hand the visitor poll destabilised this notion through subjecting the work to the predilections and preferences of the individual visitor. While envisaged as part of a marketing drive by Johnson, the poll also motivated the visiting public to exercise critical judgement and empowered them through making their views count (literally). It also demonstrated a commitment of the institution to engaging in debate about design with its audiences, one of the core characteristics of the Active Museum. The panel of judges for *Machine Art* included celebrities such as pilot Amelia Earhart, educationalist John Dewey and cultural professional Charles R. Richards,

director of New York's Museum of Science and Industry. This selection demonstrates the value MoMA placed on expert knowledge in relation to specific exhibition content, whilst at the same time enabling the lay public to exercise their judgement and more general knowledge through the mechanism of the visitor poll. Featuring products of the American industry, with legible black lettering studding the walls throughout stating the names of the US companies involved in their production and manufacturing (for example, the Aluminium Company of America, and the American Radiator Company), the exhibition was also a vehicle of promotion and celebration of national industry, cleverly enabling a wider appeal to a predominantly American audience more familiar with the worlds of industry, automobiles and factories than with modern masterpieces of fine art (Staniszewski, 1999 op.cit). Thus in bringing the formal language of art to bear on products of industry within the temporary exhibition context, *Machine Art* modelled possibilities for design exhibitions that could reposition design between aesthetic appreciation and promotion of its industrial context.

Machine Art was not conceptualised in a cultural vacuum, but rather, drew upon characteristics emerging across the practices of a range of affiliated movements. These characteristics were manifest as a shared aspiration to extend the traditional notion of aesthetic appreciation to include machines and machine effects and included purism in France, De Stijl in Holland, Constructivism in Russia and at the Bauhaus in Germany, and Precisionism in North America (Meecham and Sheldon, [2000] 2005:140).

Conceptualising and exploiting the possibilities of the temporary exhibition as a site for curatorial experimentation constitutes the third characteristic of the Design Museum as the Active Museum.

3. The Active Museum experiments with new approaches to curating design which are predominantly public-facing.

The Design Museum as the Active Museum focuses visitor engagement on its rolling programme of temporary exhibitions, recalling MoMA in its early pre-accessioning decades. The temporary exhibition and its concomitant public programme of talks, debates, workshops and performance sits at the heart of the museum's public facing activity. With its propositional, forward-facing, debate-initiating dimensions, the

temporary exhibition provides the physical and conceptual space for the Active Museum to do its ‘thinking in public’ (Arnold, 2009). It is where the museum makes its contribution to the intellectual and cultural life of design.

In so doing the Active Museum recasts more traditional notions of the curator as subject specialist, “operating behind the scenes...very much the old fashioned conservation sort of person” (Curator C), “pre-occupied with such minutiae of detail, who doesn't think - or necessarily care - about their audience, but only about what interests them” (Curator A) to a conception of the curator as publicly engaged, operating at the nexus of their institution, their discipline and the museum’s multifarious publics. The inward focus of the curator as scholarly specialist is recast across multiple new identities - co-producer, catalyst, animateur, mediator and director. In this recasting, curating is presented as an endeavour of experimentation and exploration, in which the exhibition is not primarily a vehicle for disseminating specialist in-depth knowledge, but rather, an occasion for generating knowledge in public. The fact that exhibitions are temporary is crucial as it gives license to the Active Museum to play with ideas rather than promote the argument of the exhibition as the complete story or the last word.

Accounts of new curatorial identities at the Design Museum put forward by respondents define the curator in relation to the network of relationships within which the curator operates. These relationships are not discreet but overlap to constitute a network, encompassing curator and host institution; curator and audiences; curator and exhibiting designer/s, and curator and the discipline of design. Defined within this nexus of relationships, such new conceptions of curatorial practice and identity situate the curator within Perkins’ theories of open professionalism for the twenty-first century (Perkins, H, 2002), an area I explored in my *Foundations of Professionalism* paper (Charman, 2005). They can also be located within Bauman’s thesis of the long term transformation of the role and identity of the intellectual in western culture from that of ‘legislator’ of culture, a position born out of the Enlightenment’s widespread and absolute conviction in the universal superiority of reason, to that of ‘interpreter’, a shift inculcated through the development of the modern state and the market in the late nineteenth century (Ross, M, 2004: 94).

Perkins' theory provides a counterbalance to those strategies of closure which were seen to characterize the established professions of the twentieth century. Such strategies were manifest through control over the specialist knowledge and expertise distinct to the concept of a profession, in a deliberately granted form of autonomy. Concurrent with the growth of the welfare state in the latter half of the twentieth century, the status of the professions was called into question in England as their autonomy was perceived by the state as giving them too much power and self-protection without sufficient accountability. Perkin's thesis that the twentieth century was the age of the specialist professional rings true for the profession of curating, and arguably it is this which underpins Curator A and Curator C's perceptions of the traditional curator whose specialist knowledge is regarded as for the benefit of progressing object scholarship rather than for wider public engagement.

The early twentieth century was a period of increased specialisation and separation of fields of practice within the museum. Curators increasingly withdrew from a direct relationship with the visiting public, manifesting a "growing scholarly introversion" as the focus fell increasingly on curating exhibitions and maintaining the collection (McClellan, 2003:29). Strong arguments were put forward for the value of collections per se, and museums were perceived as centres of research about their respective collections. The educational activity of the museum focused on formal education for school children (during World War One some museums even housed schools), but very little provision was made for adult visitors. State-commissioned reports of the 1920s and 1930s, in particular those by Miers in 1928 and Markham in 1938, suggested that the experience of the visitor at the museum was not of any concern in the development of exhibitions (Lang, 2004).

While in the 1960s the first professional designers were employed in museums as part of a newfound interest in display methods, visitor experience nevertheless remained second cousin to exhibition planning and curatorial work. The notion that a museum is primarily an institution of culture and only secondarily a seat of learning echoed throughout the twentieth century by generations of museum directors and curators who perceived the role of exhibitions as somehow divorced from learning and secondary to the mandates of collection and preservation (Barrett & Tapia in Tickle & Sekules, 2003:197). As considered in Chapter One, the ancillary role of learning in museums has developed into

something of much greater significance as a result of Labour's cultural policy (1997-2010), giving rise to concern among some cultural professionals that the intellectual access agenda would dilute curatorial authority and result in a concomitant loss of status for the museum (Appleton, 2004). Such anxiety is not new: it might be seen as an essential ingredient for the entrance of new social groups into the realm of cultural professionalism, for example in Poynter's worries about the explosion of commercial galleries in the late nineteenth century and the effect the new pattern of art marketing would have on the hitherto exclusive relationship between aristocratic art patron and artist (Pearson, 1982).

Shifting relationships between curators and the multiple stakeholders involved in exhibition-making continues to exert an anxiety-inducing influence on curators today. Within fine art, the professional territory and identity of the curator is similarly perceived as under threat, as changing art practice and museological pressures result in the relocation of curating from a direct relation with selection and display to an ability to generate narratives and direct a sequence of experiences (Manacorda, 2003:11 in Marincola, 2006). In this relocation the role of the curator is to promote the exhibition visit as an integrated occasion, recalling Curator A's account of the power of experience over explanation as one of the features of a design exhibition, rather than a sequence of one-on-one engagements with individual works (Manacorda, op.cit).

Thus shifting conceptions of curatorial identity and practice are not particular to the notion of the Design Museum as the Active Museum. However, the facility with which curators at the Design Museum embrace these shifting professional identities is notable. Within the field of fine art curating, the relocation of curatorial territory from selection and display to relational aesthetics (Bourriard, 2002) and the construction of experiences is perceived by some as the result of increasing encroachment on the traditional role of the curator (Cooke in Marincola, 2006:32). By contrast, conceptions of curatorial practice which are located at the nexus of the multiple constituencies involved in exhibition making are embraced by curators at the Design Museum as integral to their practice. Significantly, within my research, a commitment to visitor learning is expressed as an integral component to curating:

The hope is that they learn something they are not familiar with; they are coming away with something. It's very important to me that memories of an exhibition stay with the visitor. (Curator A)

The notion of the Design Museum as the Active Museum is, at its core, a productive and generative notion. It is manifest through the Design Museum's commitment to design that foregrounds innovation and contributes to the ongoing formation of the field of design; through the propositional nature of its exhibitions that invite audiences to think critically about design as part of a dialogue between the audience and the institution; and through the agency of temporary exhibitions as vehicles for experimentation that produce new conceptions of curatorial identities. The way in which the Active Museum holds in balance visitor experience, exhibition design and exhibition content is one of the key features of the Design Museum as the Engaging Museum, a sensibility which finds its roots in the inception of exhibition design as a discreet discipline at the Bauhaus.

ii) The Design Museum as the Engaging Museum

The notion of the Engaging Museum presents the following propositions about how exhibitions at the Design Museum engender learning:

1. The Engaging Museum takes visitors on a learning journey characterised by visual and affective dimensions as well as intellectual dimensions.
2. The Engaging Museum enables connections between visitors' personal contexts and exhibitions.

1. The Engaging Museum takes visitors on a learning journey characterised by visual and affective dimensions as well as intellectual dimensions.

The notion of the exhibition visit as a learning journey is shared by visitors and curators alike:

It's almost as if you take a learning journey, it's like a little film. you capture different images through it. (Rose)

I was so taken by the mannequins, by the film footage, by the theatrical setting ... The exhibition took over. It was a sort of journey really. (Karina)

The best exhibition in my view is one where a visitor enters, perhaps not knowing a great deal about the subject areas, moves on through their journey... (Curator A)

The picture of the learning journey that emerges from participants' accounts encompasses several dimensions, evoking personal contexts, inspired by motivations for the visit, and informed by exhibition design, interpretation and the broader environment of the museum, as well as by the content of the exhibition. These dimensions contribute to visitor learning through visual, intellectual and affective engagement. Literature in visitor studies suggests that taken together, these experiences form a gestalt experience, inter-connected and contextually bound. The notion of the gestalt experience is modelled in Falk and Dierking's 'Interactive Experience Model' in which the visit learning arises from overlapping aspects of personal, social and physical contexts (Falk & Dierking, 1992). Within the gestalt experience, the learning journey is intended to be memorable, continuing beyond the direct experience of the visit itself and manifest as the incremental and slow consolidation of existing ideas subsequent to the visit as much as the acquisition of new knowledge whilst at the museum. This recalls Falk's observation that the visit is not bound in space or time, Curator A on the role of memory in embedding learning (page 123), and Danielle on the importance of continuing learning beyond the visit proper through "extending your exhibition experience by getting additional information".

Visitor studies research emphasizes episodic memory, that is, a memory of personal experiences, as distinct from semantic memory (knowledge) and procedural memory (how to do things) in visitor recall of exhibition visits (Hein, 1998.2002:129). Episodic memory also contributes to learning in the exhibition context, as participants create meaning through making connections between memories of prior personal experiences and particular exhibits. The Design Museum as the Engaging Museum takes visitors on a learning journey characterised by two modes of engagement: the visual and the affective.

Visual Modes of Engagement

The primacy of a visual mode of engagement comes to the fore as participants recognise the potential for a greater role within exhibition interpretation for visual snapshots of the designing process. This was regarded as more effective a way of enabling visitors to develop understanding of the exhibits than would be offered through written exposition in a label, which was described as interrupting participants' engagement with the exhibition.

Try to get the story across without having lots of writing. Use images. film footage. That's when I understood what you were getting at. You can go backwards and forwards between the film footage and the work and that didn't need any writing. (Marnie)

I found the written information too blocky. (Bill)

Marnie is arguing for what can be theorised as a broadly constructivist approach to meaning-making, while Bill is inferring a sense of interruption to the flow of the exhibition, a notion that is explored in respect of the affective mode of engagement below. Constructivist learning theory recognises the active participation of the learner as integral to the process of learning. That is, it requires learning to be the result of deliberate effort of thought on the part of the learner. Constructivist learning outcomes need only be valid within the constructed reality of the learner and not in direct relation to an external, objective truth. This is not to say that constructivism endorses an 'anything goes' epistemology; credibility arises from the value of the concepts in leading to action (use) and in the consistency of the ideas one with another (Hein, 1995: 34). The preference for a visual mode of engagement proffered by visitor participants arises from a conception of learning based on making connections between the exhibit and to visual interpretive material that provides insights into the process of designing, for example relating to materials and manufacturing techniques, to the real-world function of the design.

The supporting information was really good. I needed to see someone actually riding the bike to understand the relevance. (Marnie)

Design needs context, it needs personal relevance, even if it's just being able to imagine how it works. (Rose)

Opportunities to learn about design in the exhibition context are strengthened when the visitor makes connections between exhibits and the designing and real-world functional contexts of the exhibits. Scaffolding meaning through making connections also relates to Curator D's reflection on a successful curatorial strategy, one in which propositions about design are made through the proximal arrangement of two or three exhibits, with the intention that understanding arises as the visitor makes comparative readings between and across exhibits. Ausubel's theory of 'advance organisers' is valuable in

consideration of learning as a process of making connections. The critical point in Ausubel's theory lies with his assertion that in order for learning materials to be of use to a student they must be "relatable to his or her structure of knowledge on a nonarbitrary and nonverbatim [sic] basis" (Ausubel in Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978: 41).

This is the heart of Ausubel's theory: students must be able to connect their new knowledge to previous knowledge in a way that is neither random, nor a simple matter of memorisation. While the independent and informal nature of adult learning through an exhibition visit to the Engaging Museum is such that curators cannot know the full extent of visitors' prior knowledge, and visitors do not participate in structured learning activity, Ausubel's theory of advance organisers nonetheless is valuable in relation to current visitor studies data at the museum. Demographic data from Audiences London gathered in 2009 for the Design Museum tells us that the majority of visitors come to the museum already equipped with a measure of knowledge about design: atypically within Falk's model, the museum's audience is dominated by 'hobbyists'. As such, exhibition interpretation that references design processes, including professional and commercial contexts, will afford these visitors greater opportunities for learning to take place that builds upon, or relates to, to prior knowledge. The expressed need is for elucidatory and visual, rather than expository and written, textual interpretive material. The preference for such materials also reveals dissatisfaction with visitor engagement afforded solely by a singular presentation of an exhibit. As Danielle observes,

A single object on its own doesn't really tell you much, does it? (Danielle)

Danielle's pithy comment conjures up a visual mode of engagement described as 'learning at a glance', used in relation to strategies for display in art museums dating from the end of the eighteenth century (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007:190). The conceit of learning at a glance is rooted in the application of rational taxonomies of display for instructional purposes, which, I suggest, found its apotheosis in the white cube of the modernist art museum in which everything is expunged from the viewer's engagement with the work other than the work itself:

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all clues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art'. (Doherty, 1976:14)

Learning at a glance is a visual mode of engagement predicated on the viewer's ability to understand both the organising principles of a display – that of chronology and schools – and thereby to understand its subject matter. The import of the notion for this study resides in the particular character of looking to learn in the design exhibition, in which the exhibit is visually understood in relation to its designing and functional contexts rather than independent of them:

Learning how much effort goes into producing these items I think is key to understanding them. (Bill)

You have the opportunity to focus on process, how the designer works, where their inspiration comes from, how they work with the manufacturer, the producer ...there are so many different facets to it. (Curator A)

The implications of the difference between a 'pure' and unencumbered visual engagement with an art exhibit, and an informed and elucidatory visual engagement with a design exhibit are further explored in The Design Museum as the Distinctive Museum.

Affective Modes of Engagement

The second mode of engagement relates to how the exhibition experience engendered affective dimensions to participant's learning, complementary to learning that might be more readily described as intellectually cognitive. Curator A summarised these two types of learning in her observation that an exhibition "can be both experience and education".

The separation of experience and education can be expanded with reference to Bloom's taxonomy for learning, which differentiates between cognitive (education) and affective (experience) predispositions for learning, leading to cognitive and affective outcomes. Bloom's taxonomy also includes psychomotor skills, which were not referenced in the data. The cognitive predisposition comprises the learner's knowledge base, verbal ability, comprehension and study style, while the affective predisposition comprises interests, attitudes, motivations and self-concept (Child, 2004). For participants the experience of an exhibition visit was motivated by an emphasis on one or other of these

dimensions. For Bill, the exhibition visit is for the most part envisaged as a means to an end, a practical opportunity to inform designing with an avowed emphasis on and privileging of cognitive outcomes:

I thought I might get some ideas for fabrics or the way things go together for my car interiors, stuff like that. So, education.

Whereas for Danielle, the learning anticipated through a museum visit also encompasses the affective realm, in that it is envisaged to lead to personal growth:

For me, a museum is always, you're going to grow. It's that learning isn't it? You're going to come out of it with something extra, whatever that might be.

While participants expressed preferences for either cognitive or affective dispositions for learning, the data presents a more nuanced and overlapping relationship between the two areas. Bill found himself drawn into an imaginative engagement with Marloes Ten Bohmer's innovative shoe design and Danielle reflected on how the same exhibit only made sense to her because it included the mould for the shoes, which were essential to developing her knowledge base about the piece. The complementarity between these types of learning is underscored by Reid's suggestion that intellectual and affective faculties are simply different ways of knowing and understanding the world:

We cannot eliminate the truth that in enjoyable intellectual or aesthetic experiences, we feel, in those cases, both cognitively and affectively. (Reid, 1986: 20)

Curator B recognised the potential of the exhibition visit for engendering both intellectually and affectively cognitive forms of engagement, describing how when she visited an exhibition her expectation was to come away "knowing as much as you can, either knowing or feeling."

Reid argues that a false dualism persists between learning that is intellectually cognitive, concerned with the life of the mind and the development of knowledge, and that of affective cognition, involving feelings and emotions. It is reductive to set thinking against feeling, especially in terms of the development of the self. Rather, subjective engagement stemming from personal contexts is equally capable of effecting learning, as

was seen in Karina's response to *After Words*. Seemingly, the exhibition is a potent environment for amalgamating cognitive and affective learning. Reid's differentiating yet overlapping concept of cognitive and affective feeling underlies Bill's rumination on the effectiveness of exhibition display and visual interpretation that enables the visitor to learn without explicit awareness that learning is taking place:

It's letting the work and the person 'be' in such a way where someone doesn't have to think too much but an exchange of information has happened. (Bill)

Commensurately, respondents use the term 'flow' to describe their experience in *From Fashion and Back* and *Designs of the Year 2009*, with Marnie describing how "You just flow through - whether you like the work or not, it just flows", and a Visit Card respondent stating that the exhibition "had good flow to it. There was a lot to take in but it worked."

The concept of flow as a dimension of learning in the exhibition context is described by Csikszentmihalyi as an experiential state, comprising a state of mind that is "spontaneous, almost automatic, like the flow of a strong current" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995). In this state, learning and satisfaction are optimised because interaction with the exhibit is intrinsically rewarding, engaging the visitor in such a way that positive emotional or intellectual changes occur without explicit awareness of the processes through which these changes are inculcated. For Rose and Marnie these changes were manifest emotionally:

I couldn't believe that fashion could make this beautiful spectacle. I cried, I had my face up to the glass. (Marnie)

The day that I came here, I was absolutely blown away. I was just on a total high. I couldn't believe it. I was just on cloud nine. (Rose)

In describing the dimensions of learning in the exhibition, the extent to which participants appear to have engaged affectively – that is, through subjective feelings and emotions – as well as cognitively, counterbalances the commonly held view that learning's primary aim is 'cognitive understanding' (Reid, 1986). Rather than separating cognitive and affective dispositions and outcomes, the exhibition visit engenders learning that is an

amalgam of the faculties of mind and of emotion, albeit with different emphases according to visit motivation.

Notably, affective engagement in the design exhibition also arises from the emotional relationship humans have with objects. As Curator B reflected, “objects, to my mind, are imbued with emotion” (Curator B).

Such emotions encompass a wide landscape. In the private sphere these might be emotions of sentiment (my late mother’s spectacles), of pride (the bound copy of this thesis), or of nostalgia (my daughter’s first pair of shoes), to name but a few. Participant responses to their exhibition visit suggest that even when objects are relocated from private or commercial contexts to the public domain of the museum exhibition, they do not entirely shed their ability to evoke emotional responses that call upon the private world of the visitor, as Rose recounts in reference to *From Fashion and Back*:

I felt like crying because it reminded me of who I used to be, my heart was pounding, I want to go home right now and find that college course.

Rose’s intensely personal experience in *From Fashion and Back* was not the sole register of visitor engagement. Elsewhere in the research group, discussion focused on how the exhibitions fostered discipline-specific learning, with Danielle emphasizing how “part of my learning was that I learnt new words, technical, specialist terms”.

Rose and Curator D’s responses illustrate an epistemological debate within museum studies as to the nature of meaning-making. The debate centres on the extent to which meaningful engagement with exhibits resides in the attainment of what are perceived to be true, correct understandings of objects, and in relativistic, subjective meaning construed out of the visitor’s personal and social contexts, which potentially bear little or no relation to, for example, the disciplinary context of the work, or its maker’s intention.

This is hugely complex debate that forms the subject of philosophical ruminations on the museum (Hein, H., 2000; Genoways, 2006), permeates writing on curatorial practice (Crimp, 1993; Marincola, 2007; Reid, S., 2005; Serota, 2000) and underpins literature that references learning theory in the museum (Hein, G., 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999 &

2007; Lang et al, 2006). For philosophers such as Hilde Hein, this debate is consistent with a widespread decline of faith in the singularity of reality and the uniformity of truth (2000:xi). This decline produces post-modernity's multivalent pluralities in which the material and conceptualised object ceases to be perceived as an autonomous entity, possessing real meaning and supervenient value to one that is rendered meaningful only through the subjective constructions and inferences placed upon it by the museum visitor (Hein, op.cit). From a curatorial perspective, the surrender of notions of real meaning and supervenient value has been perceived as an infringement upon curatorial autonomy and integrity (Appleton, 2004:2; Reid, S. 2005:2). However, the role of the visitor in actively producing meaning can be traced back to Duchamp's introduction of 'readymades' into the gallery environment, placing responsibility upon the gallery context and the visitor to frame the object conceptually so as to perceive it as art. While design occupies a different conceptual space than art, a contention that is further explored in *The Distinctive Museum*, the act of displaying design in the gallery context nevertheless involves the visitor in a participatory and relational involvement in order to produce meaning.

There is a middle ground between the polar positions of positivism and interpretivism, between transmission and constructivism, between museum as authority and museum as arbitrator of meaning. Arguably this is found in exhibitions that are curated so as to engender both cognitive and affective forms of engagement, which allow for the visitor to learn both *about* the exhibits and *through* the exhibits. My data suggests that such opportunities for learning are strengthened when the exhibition enables connections to be made between exhibits and personal contexts, the second constituting characteristic of the Engaging Museum discussed below.

2. The Engaging Museum enables connections between visitors' personal contexts and exhibitions.

The centrality of personal context is widely acknowledged within theories of learning, be it contextual learning (Falk & Dierking, 1992), hermeneutic approaches to museum education (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999 & 2007), or situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to name but a few examples. Visitors interpret museum exhibits from their own perspective and in relation to their own personal context, comprising the rich tapestry of

personal experiences, attitudes and knowledge which together influence understanding and therein learning. Of particular relevance to this analysis is the extent to which personal context shapes meaning-making, explored in museum education with reference to the hermeneutic philosophy of Dilthey (1976) and Gadamer (1976). For Dilthey, constructing understanding is a dialogic process of piecing together the detail with the whole:

The whole of a work must be understood from the individual words and their combinations, and yet the full comprehension of the detail presupposes the understanding of the whole. (Dilthey, 1976:115)

Gadamer applies this approach to interpreting experience in general, which in relation to my study, includes meaning-making in relation to artworks and objects. The dialogue between detail and the whole is never-ending. It is a circular process in which new and enriched understandings arise from new sources of knowledge:

The discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished: it is in fact an infinite process. (Gadamer, 1974:124)

Personal context underpins the dynamic nature of the 'hermeneutic circle', encompassing attributes such as prior knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and values:

For hermeneutic philosophers, meaning-making is shaped by the inevitability of prior knowledge; the effect of tradition, the past as it works in the present; the prejudices and biases that are part of being human; and the capacity to interrogate the past. (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994/1999:42)

The capacity to relate the past to the present in order to sort productive from non-productive preconceptions (Gallagher, 1992) proves a fertile feature of the hermeneutic approach to meaning-making for Rose and Karina. Describing how their experiences of viewing particular works drew upon aspects of prior personal and cultural knowledge, the extent to which meaning-making intimately inflected with notions of the self was expressed. While Rose's meaning-making strategies conjured up a preconception of herself from the past, such as to produce an idea of a possible future (page 89). Karina's personal and cultural history imbued *After Words* with a depth of meaning unavailable to other research participants, resonant not only personally but also with the curatorial description of the work based on Chalayan's intention, as stated in the exhibition leaflet.

Dilthey's emphasis on the importance of understanding detail in presupposing the meaning of the whole of a work is illustrated by Karina's moment of realisation about why all the models were wearing flat shoes (a detail unnoticed by the other participants), in reference to sure-footedness in the event of fleeing their home. With this insight, the individual parts of *After Words* coalesced, and the work became meaningful.

Mercer and Paris's theory of three kinds of object-self relations in the museum context further refine the role of personal context in effecting learning. The theory attempts to account for works that sustain visitor interactions and as such engender learning arising from a deep and prolonged engagement with exhibits. The first is identity confirmation in which the visitor's personal knowledge or experience is validated, for example by seeing a painting which is familiar, appreciated and consistent with aesthetic tastes or as above, by evoking an event in personal history. The second is identity-disconfirming as the object calls into question deeply held beliefs, knowledge or feelings, which through its troubling and unsettling effect provokes a sustained engagement. The third type of object-self relation is that which extends a visitor's sense of personal identity, not only in the present but as it relates to past selves and possible future selves, as with Rose's rush of enthusiasm to explore further study. It is difficult to readily describe the kind of learning that such a response produces: it is, perhaps best described as part of the process of gaining self-knowledge.

Museum educators recognise that this form of learning is more like a personal characteristic or disposition than demonstrated knowledge, but it is enduring, emotional and powerful. (Paris, 2002:263 in Genoways, 2006)

Personal context intimately informs visitor identity, revealed to be a further key constituent of learning in the exhibition context. My data suggests that visitor identity produces two differently nuanced types of learning. In utilising a notion of visitor identity I adopt Falk's visitor studies model of 'identity-related visitor motivations' as discussed in the Literature Review, rather than approaching the question of visitor identity from a psychoanalytic perspective. To recap, in this theory, the notion of identity is both internal and external, arising from self-perception and in relation to how others perceive us. Given that we each have multiple identities situated within the realities of the physical and socio-cultural world, Falk uses the uppercase I and lowercase i to differentiate between these identities. The uppercase I denotes 'top-line' identities such

as gender and nationality, whereas the lowercase i denotes situated identities at particular moments. Falk's research suggests that the lower case 'i' identities motivate museum visits and shape the meaning of the visit, made visible through visitors' descriptions particularly in relation to their expectations and memories of the visit. This thesis is born out in my research, and further refined here in relation to the Design Museum as the Engaging Museum.

In exploring the extent to which visitor identity shapes learning in the Engaging Museum, I suggest that two types of learning can be identified. The first I describe as *instrumental* learning, that is, learning that arises from extrinsic motivation, manifest as an explicit desire to gain knowledge, insight and inspiration for professional or educational means. It would appear that instrumental learning operates predominantly at the level of intellectual, cognitive engagement or as Bill described it, the factual side of it (Karina, introducing Bill). Instrumental learning is fostered through visitor identities that relate to professional or educational contexts, contexts which participants recognised from the outset as differentiated across the research group:

He's a young man who thinks about design his whole life. Whereas we now have to spend our time thinking what's for tea? Fish fingers, etc. (Karina)

The second type of learning I describe as *core* learning, which arises from intrinsic motivation, described in relation to personal context and calling upon notions of the self, for example drawn from the visitor's past. It would appear that core learning is inculcated through emotionally and imaginatively engaged responses to exhibits, including what Rose describes as a sensory experience.

The extent to which exhibition design is a protagonist in effecting both instrumental and core learning is explored below in The Design Museum as The Distinctive Museum.

iii) The Design Museum as the Distinctive Museum

The notion of the Design Museum as the Distinctive Museum presents the following two propositions on how the disciplinary specificity of design informs learning in the exhibition context:

1. The Distinctive Museum foregrounds the role of exhibition design in enabling learning.
2. The Distinctive Museum inculcates the interested gaze as a mode of looking at design in the exhibition context.

1. The Distinctive Museum foregrounds the role of exhibition design in enabling learning.

A distinguishing feature of the Design Museum as the Distinctive Museum resides in how exhibition design constitutes its own field of design, a field in which visitor experience is acknowledged as a specific concern. While curators strive to ensure that exhibition design does not overwhelm exhibition content, neither is it perceived as a neutral backdrop for exhibits: “You have to make sure that the exhibits are allowed space to breathe” (Curator B). Rather, exhibition design is attributed pedagogic agency in conveying the sensibility of an exhibition, with Curator B describing how she uses the environment “to convey my argument, to reinforce the notion of the exhibition”.

In order to achieve this, the careful selection of exhibition designers is paramount. Curator C emphasizes the importance of commissioning exhibition designers who demonstrate sensitivity to the subject of an exhibition. The ideal exhibition designers are those who are:

so passionate, they immerse themselves and get super excited, and through that willingness to understand a person’s work or theme, they get under the skin of it and also understand what *we* are trying to do, which is often where something very good happens, and that comes through in the visitor experience a lot of the time. (Curator C)

Exhibition design is thus tasked both with conveying the ethos of the designer or theme of an exhibition, within an understanding of curatorial intention for an exhibition, which in turn is informed by the overall mission of the institution. Furthermore, through the act of designing an exhibition, exhibition designers are themselves contributing to the field of exhibition design, a characteristic which also relates to the notion of the Design Museum as the Active Museum. The extent to which designing temporary exhibitions is regarded as a site for experimentation, with little in the way of display orthodoxies, is demonstrated through the heterogeneity of exhibition design at the museum, not least in the annual iterations of *Designs of the Year* in which each exhibition is designed differently in response to perceived strengths and critical responses to earlier incarnations. This also recalls curators on the propositional nature of the temporary exhibition, in which the exhibition is conceived as an essay - an attempt – to experiment with and progresses the possibilities of design.

As the Design Museum we need to show that we are on our toes and we are pushing things visually. (Curator B)

The embedded relationship between exhibition design and visitor experience is, arguably, one of the enduring legacies of the Bauhaus for the Design Museum as the Distinctive Museum. It is a distinguishing feature within the history of exhibition design, in which the influence of the Bauhaus is considerable, although not exclusive. The inter-war years of twentieth-century Europe were witness to a strident and radically creative set of challenges to the conventions of installing and displaying objects within the museum context. The experimental and politically charged approach of avant-garde artists focused attention on exhibition design as a creative medium – that of installation - and ideological practice with its own formal languages and political agency. Throughout the 1920's and 1930's exhibition design was a key concern at the Bauhaus. In its 1919 manifesto pamphlet, Gropius wrote an introduction to the principles of the Bauhaus that included new research into the nature of exhibitions as part of the core curricula. The need for research of this nature centred on the recognition that displaying visual work and sculpture within the framework of architecture could potentially lead to confusion as the different practices jostled for position. This resulted in the need for a conception of exhibition design as a discreet form of practice. While there was no dedicated workshop to focus on exhibition design under Gropius, with Hannes Meyer at the helm from 1928,

the school was re-structured into four major departments: architecture, commercial art, interior design and textiles. The commercial art department included exhibition design and its emphasis shifted towards advertising and exhibition techniques. The experimental and reflexive approaches to exhibition design developed at the Bauhaus are cited as one of the foremost influences on the early years of temporary exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (Staniswecki, 1995), a legacy which extends to the Design Museum today. For Bayer, writing in 'Aspects of Exhibitions and Museums' this afforded exhibition design new status not as a field within design but as a distinct discipline.

Exhibition design has evolved as a new discipline, as an apex of all media and powers of communication and of collective efforts and effects. The combined means of visual communication constitutes a remarkable complexity: language as visible printing or as sound, pictures as symbols, paintings and photographs, sculptural media, materials and surfaces, color, light, movement (of the display as well as the visitor), films, diagrams and charts. The total application of all plastic and psychological means (more than anything else) makes exhibition design an intensified and new language. (Bayer in Staniszewski, 2001:3)

In considering how early developments in the field of exhibition design inform the notion of the Design Museum as the Distinctive Museum, the work of Bauhaus exponent Frederick Kiesler in the 1925 Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* is significant for its holistic approach to exhibition content, design and to the visitor's experience. In line with the Bauhaus philosophy. Kiesler's concerns centred on the drive to unite art and industry, rendering everyday, utilitarian artefacts as central to its aesthetics (Fer, Bachelor and Wood 1993:88). His innovations were manifest through the invention of a new physical approach to display, which he termed 'Leger et Trager' (hereafter referenced as L & T) and in his subsequent development of a new theory of exhibition design for which he coined the term 'correalism', meaning 'the science of relationships'.

Correalism locates the traditional art object displayed in the exhibition context as integral to an expanding exhibition environment rather than as an autonomous or individuated entity (Staniszewski, 2001:69). Through so doing, the environment itself assumes the same importance as the exhibited object: they function in tandem to shape and enhance the visitor experience. At the 1925 *Expo*, L & T was presented by Kiesler as an alternative method or mode of installation design to that of the rigid constraints of

traditional exhibition conventions to date. Such conventions saw paintings uniformly attached to the walls of the gallery, stacked in several variegated rows, with sculptures presented on plinths and scant attention given to any form of interpretation. Clearly influenced by his background in architecture and theatre design, Kiesler's L & T system included freestanding mountable and demountable displays of vertical and horizontal beams, and supporting horizontal and vertical panels with cantilevers allowing the visitor to adjust images and objects to their eye level - and thence to their viewing satisfaction. Artworks were not attached to the wall but instead, their physical properties entered and shared the viewing space of the visitor. The open, transparent and flexible formal properties of the L & T system challenged the fixed viewpoint of classical perspective and spatial closure in which visitor engagement with the work was solely acknowledged through the disembodied aesthetic eye (Illeris, 2009).

Reflecting on his revolutionary theory of correalism when invited to design the 'Art of the Century' gallery for Peggy Guggenheim in New York in 1942, Kiesler described the incursion of the work into the visitor's physical space as grounded in his intention to engender an intimate, in-depth engagement with the work such that the boundaries between 'looking' and 'being' dissolve:

...there are no frames or borders between art, space, life. In eliminating the frame, the spectator recognises his act of seeing, or receiving, as a participation in the creative process no less essential and direct than the artist's own. (Kiesler in Phillips, 1989:114)

The contemporary relevance of Kiesler can be found in Bill's preference for exhibitions that are successful "in letting the work and the person 'be' in such a way where someone doesn't have to think too much but an exchange of information has happened."

Exhibition design is one of the tools that curators use to effect the kind of close, participatory relationship between exhibition content and learning that Bill describes. When used to create what Curator A terms an immersive environment for *From Fashion and Back*, it is perceived as enabling the visitor to learn both in an intellectually cognitive register and also through affective engagement. The extent to which exhibition design evokes affective responses is revealed in Marnie's emotional reaction to exhibits in *From*

Fashion and Back (page 90). Marnie's response is illuminated when considered through Highmore's definition of aesthetics in design as:

primarily concerned with material experiences, with the way the sensual world greets the sensorial body and with the affective forces that are generated in such meetings. (Highmore, 2009:10)

For Highmore, the aesthetics of design relate to the sensual, material life of objects which can exert a powerful effect on us and which, arguably, exhibition design utilises in evoking the power of experience over explanation to communicate ideas (Curator A). Kiesler's sensibility is echoed in the curatorial intention to create a physically and psychologically immersive environment through the installation design for *From Fashion and Back* (Curator A). The design of the physiologically life-like mannequins, positioned at eye-level with the visitor and engaged in a range of activities presents a radical departure in the presentation of high concept fashion. The exhibition design of *From Fashion and Back* signals a move away from fashion's commercial context and into the space and time of the exhibition visitor. The exhibition becomes a total environment in which learning, constituted through the meanings and experiences of the visitor, is shaped by the specific determinants of time, place and function. Participants' descriptions of the agency of this particular display environment suggest that a form of double-display takes place for the visitor in which the environment is as much a component of meaning-making as the exhibits themselves, and yet it does not overwhelm the exhibits, still affording them space to breathe. As curators state, when exhibiting design, there is a particularly fine line to tread between exhibition design that complements and enriches the exhibits, and that which threatens to overwhelm the subject of the exhibition. Thus the Chalayan exhibition deliberately offered a staged experience for the visitor because it strove to elicit the performative nature of haute couture fashion design on the catwalk:

I love the way they used confined places, the way you suddenly found yourself drawn to an area. The use of light was very good, sometimes you'd find yourself in a light area, then suddenly it's very dark. (Karina)

The museum's done brilliantly - there's written information, there's visual information, you might have a film, you might have the product in front of you, things are hanging from the ceiling, things are hanging on the walls, things are

right in front of you ... you're walking around a big space, you're walking around a small space, it's light, it's dark. (Marnie)

This is not O'Doherty's mythic ideal-type white cube gallery environment, in which everything but the work itself is expunged in order to provide an unadulterated pure visual engagement with the work of art:

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all clues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art'. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. (O'Doherty, 1976:14)

Rather, it is an environment in which the architectural, spatial and material potentiality of exhibition design are fully embraced and exploited to create a series of 'mis-en-scene' which are integral to the visitor's understanding of the exhibition. Notably, the second room in *From Fashion and Back* comprised a circular space, mannequins with paint brush in hand, frozen in the act of painting the white walls black (figure 4b). So the white cube is literally as well as metaphorically transformed. But just as the Design Museum as the Distinctive Museum is not the modernist white cube, nor is it the Victoria and Albert Museum, the expository and didactic intent of which Henry Cole described as an open book.

As explored earlier, exhibitions are curated not to offer a completist view on a subject, but to provide the visitor with multiple insights such as to enable the visitor to enter the world of design (Curator D). Exhibition design is a core component in this process, as Curator B illustrates with reference to Prouvé:

Michael Marriot was very much was of Prouvé's ilk ... a 3D designer, he designs furniture, functional, plain, unshowy furniture. And also he's very aware of using materials in a quite puritan, unwasteful way, and as a maker and designer he was very in tune with Prouvé who also makes and manufactures his designs. (Curator B)

The relationship between exhibition design and exhibition interpretation is also distinctive in this regard. For some museum professionals, interpretation in the form of written text and audio guides, for example, is viewed straightforwardly as the method through which the museum delivers its content (Black, 2005:184). The Design Museum

as the Distinctive Museum uses both exhibition design and interpretation more actively and holistically than such a description would suggest. Exhibition design is integral to the subject of an exhibition, it is understood as a way of conveying a design ethos and sensibility – and hence the need for the selection of exhibition designers whose work is in some way sympathetic to the subject of the exhibition.

In turn, interpretation is not a vehicle for wholesale delivery of content but for enabling variegated insights into exhibits so that the viewer can scaffold meanings. From the perspective of the Distinctive Museum, it is wise to exercise caution towards general claims or descriptions about exhibition design and interpretation.

In a caption I would generally have just one snippet of information that gave you another way into that object alongside aesthetically – it might be about their inspiration, how it was made – I wouldn't necessarily have consistency, I would have a mixture so that throughout the whole exhibition you got a sense of process, and also a sense of the designer's ethos, reflected by the overall design of the exhibition. (Curator B).

Embracing the potential of exhibition design to create immersive environments for learning is demonstrably effective in provoking and sustaining on-going visitor interest, making the learning journey something of a voyage into the world of design, in which the museum “invites the visitor to enter the world of that designer - you're offering access to that world” (Curator D). The extent to which exhibition design shapes the visit as an immersive experience is further suggested through Bill and Rose's descriptions of the effect of the mannequins in *From Fashion and Back* (page 96). As well as recalling Kiesler on the dissolution of the boundaries between looking and being in the exhibition context, the idea of the viewer being absorbed into the work finds resonance with Merleau Ponty's phenomenological, corporeal interaction with art: “I live in it from the inside, I am immersed in it” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964).

Conceiving of the design exhibition as an experience for the visitor shares conceptual territory with new thinking in art curating, in which “His or her competence is relocated from a direct relation with selection and display to an ability to generate narratives and direct a sequence of events” (Manacorda in Cooke in Marincola, 2006:32).

However, a significant point of distinction between curating art as experience and design as experience can be located in the brief consideration of exhibition design above. In the field of contemporary art, the notion of the exhibition as experience arises partly in response to changes in art practice and to museological pressures and is described as a defensive curatorial strategy (Cooke in Marincola, 2007). Whereas in design, the notion of the exhibition offering an experience for the embodied viewer (rather than affording the visitor a series of individuated aesthetic engagements with exhibits) finds its roots in the history of exhibition design, illustrated in the work of Kiesler discussed earlier, and of Bayer (referenced in Chapter Six: Conclusion). This is not to say however that the design exhibition as immersive experience is the sole progenitor of learning in the Design Museum as the Distinctive Museum. As all the curators emphatically state, exhibitions need to work both as experience and more explicitly as educational environments in which the learning is grounded in the specificity of design as a discipline.

You can only go so far with an immersive experience - you can't answer the question of the work's significance. This is where the range of interpretive tools comes into play - introductory text, film footage - all these tools help the visitor come to a fuller understanding of the work. (Curator A)

My analysis reveals the extent to which exhibition design shapes learning in the context of an exhibition visit at the Design Museum. The local character of my study means that the two case study exhibitions which formed the backdrop to my data gathering should not be taken as representative of all possible types of exhibition design. Nevertheless there is a significance to be found in the distinctive history of exhibition design that acknowledges the potency of exhibition design as a medium for display and the agency of the embodied and enactive viewer.

2. The Distinctive Museum inculcates the interested gaze as a mode of looking at design in the exhibition context.

It is my contention that the research group revealed a particular way of looking at and understanding design in the exhibition context. I describe this way of looking as the interested gaze. The interested gaze is a way of looking at design that is differentiated from our everyday encounters with design. It is inculcated through the exhibition context. For curators, the language of exhibition display invites reflection and focus, elevating design “in terms of appreciation” (Curator C).

You want to give each object that moment of contemplation ...it's a moment to think about the effort and thought that goes into the simplest of things. It's a bit of beauty – you want people to appreciate how beauty can be mass produced and simple. (Curator B)

The Active Museum explored how design is endorsed as culturally significant through removing design from its everyday context and re-presenting it in the exhibition. This is not simply a matter of elevating the status of design through the agency of the museum environment, with its connotations of cultural gravitas (Bayley, 2007) and epistemic authority (Bennett, 1995:2005, Hein. H. 2000; McClellan, 2003). Rather, it is about retuning how the visitor experiences design. Viktor Shklovsky's essay 'Art as Technique' is elucidatory in this regard. Shklovsky bemoans how by virtue of everyday use and encounter, we become so over-familiar with the objects which surround us and the language with which we communicate that both object and language cease to exist beyond the most cursory usage. He terms this process 'habitualization' and attributes it some fearsome characteristics:

Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war ... we apprehend objects only as shapes with imprecise extensions; we do not see them in their entirety but rather recognize them by their main characteristics. We see the object as though it were enveloped in a sack. We know what it is by its configuration, but we see only its silhouette. (Shklovsky, 1965)

What is needed is something to call our attention back to a state of precision, a process of defamiliarisation that Shklovsky attributes to art. Arguably, the process of defamiliarisation translates to the design exhibition. Through locating objects differently, the exhibition 'disacquaints' the visitor with design such that it must be experienced anew:

The approach is about pulling the object out of context... I'm not so keen on making the designed object so special, so iconic, but sometimes they really are! But sometimes you need to pull things that have been too iconic back into their original context, their historic context, or their process context ... bring them back down to earth when they have become a bit too rarefied. Whereas sometimes a basic object such as this [picks up a glass] needs to be rarefied, given space. Sometimes the space it requires is crowdedness ... it's to make you think about that object, take it out of its pigeon hole a bit. Because design is complex, and I like to show complexity but not fussiness. (Curator B)

While it may seem at odds with design's tactile and utilitarian qualities, the exhibition's emphasis on looking at, rather than handling design, is intrinsic to this process of defamiliarisation. My argument is that the process of reacquainting the visitor with design, such as to afford design the critical appreciation that curators seek, is through inculcating the interested gaze.

The interested gaze characterises the act of looking at design in the exhibition context as follows:

1. Reading the exhibit as embedded in the industrial processes of design and manufacture, and the commensurate real world functions.
2. Reading the stylistic and surface qualities of an exhibit in terms of the creative and intellectual endeavour behind it.
3. Reading the object in relation to the exhibition design.

Taken together, the interested gaze reveals learning about design as contingent on understanding across a range of discipline-specific contexts. The exhibit cannot be effectively understood if perceived as autonomous, as Danielle suggested in her reflection that "a single object on its own doesn't really tell you much, does it?"

Rather, learning arises when exhibitions are curated so as to afford the visitor insight into those aspects of design deemed significant to understanding and appreciation.

Throughout the research group, participants repeatedly returned to the value of visual interpretive material concerning process, manufacturing, production, function and impact of the exhibits as integral to their learning about the exhibits. Where it was lacking, this was noted and criticised. Significantly, it is not only participants who were at pains to point out the importance of designing and real world contexts for exhibits. Curators too on a number of occasions distinguished these as integral to exhibiting design:

You have the opportunity to focus on process, how the designer works, where their inspiration comes from, how they work with the manufacturer, the producer ...there are so many different facets to it. (Curator A)

There are of course, different approaches to presenting design contextually than those presented and discussed by my research respondents. An historical example can be witnessed in Phillip Johnson's decision to arrange a vertical stack of chairs in the 1934 *Machine Art* exhibition at MoMA, New York as a metaphorical and gestural reference to the industrial context of mass production. Similarly for Curator B, the industrial context of mass manufacture plays an important role in fostering critical appreciation:

The manufacturing context tells us more about society and the object's place in society. It's important to provide this kind of detail when possible, because information affects your judgement of something. (Curator B)

Other aspects might include the physical process of production, as with the shoe moulds for Marloes Ten Bohmer's work. Alternatively, as Bill advocates, these aspects may include insight into the creative and intellectual work behind an object, because "Learning how much effort goes into producing these items I think is key to understanding them."

Curator C calls attention to the difference between looking at design as if it were an art exhibit, to be appreciated primarily for formal and sensible qualities, and to looking that highlights the role of design process as integral to learning. This differentiation recalls Buchanan's argument that the surface, stylistic qualities of design are design thinking made manifest (Buchanan, 1995). This is not to deny the value of what might be termed the aesthetic qualities of design, but rather, to suggest that visitors read and appreciate these qualities contingent upon an understanding of the physical, creative and intellectual processes intrinsic to their realisation, expressed by Bill's wish that "Looking at the tulle dresses, I'd like to have seen the pattern."

The aesthetic qualities of an exhibition are purported by Curator B to be one of the key motivating factors for an exhibition visit:

We have a lot of visitors who go in and probably would never look at a caption but would just get a visual high from our exhibitions - I think a lot of our visitors come for an aesthetic fix. (Curator B)

The notion of the aesthetic fix aptly informs the third characteristic of the interested eye. Visitors learn not only by exploring individual exhibits in terms of the design contexts

considered above, but also, as considered in the Engaging Museum, through the overall visual and affective impact of the exhibition design. The pleasure that visitors derive from the visual qualities of the design exhibition at the Design Museum, and the key contribution of this to enabling learning, is born out through the research group's dissatisfaction with written interpretation, and preference for visual media such as contextual images and film to complement exhibition design in engendering learning. Curator B's description of the museum's audience as predominantly visually intelligent (Curator B) recalls Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, at the heart of which is the notion that people think and learn in many different ways. Even if treated with circumspection – and the idea of multiple intelligences has been widely critiqued (infed. 2010) – it is significant that participants expressed such a pronounced bent towards visual interpretation and disaffection with written text, too much of which becomes a barrier to looking and learning, aptly described by Rose: "I really had to put a lot of effort into reading all the captions properly. Afterwards I was kind of spent."

In formulating the notion of the interested gaze as the primary mode of looking at design in the exhibition context, the character of the visual, aesthetic engagement – what Curator B elsewhere describes as the visual punch – is grounded in the specificity of design. The encounter with the design exhibit can be distinguished from the encounter with the art object, existing in and of itself, as O'Doherty describes the apotheosis of aesthetic engagement with the art exhibit through the conceit of the gallery as the white cube (O'Doherty, op.cit). On the contrary, design exhibits are anything but autonomous: they are perceived as objects embedded in their various design processes and contexts.

Despite what may initially appear as obvious parities between the gallery environment as the context for displaying design and for displaying fine art, the approaches demonstrated by participants, and expressed by curators, to looking and learning about design in the exhibition context emphatically differentiates it from those associated with the experience of fine art in the exhibition context. While it is essential to acknowledge that the interested gaze garners aesthetic pleasure as well as cognitive and affective understanding, such aesthetic pleasure is contingent on understanding the exhibit as it relates to its disciplinary specificity. In its contingency and contextuality, the interested eye deliberately evokes and differentiates itself from the Kantian conceit of disinterest as a condition of aesthetic judgement, set out in the *Critique of Judgement* and from

Bourdieu's notion of the pure gaze, accounted for through the division in the 18th century between design and fine art:

The 'pure' gaze is a historical invention linked to the emergence of an autonomous field of artistic production, that is, a field capable of imposing its own norms on both the production and the consumption of its products. (Bourdieu, 1984: 4)

The separation of design and fine art has been extensively researched and falls outside the scope of this thesis (Shiner, 2001). A crucial point of differentiation, however, is that design is underpinned by the weight of the brief. The brief provides both its starting and its end point; utility and mass-production are the watchwords (Sudjic, 2008). This locates design differently from fine art and the idea of the open, singular and autonomous artwork. Instead, design's conditions of utility, mass manufacture and consumption render it as confined (the design adage of 'creativity within limits'), multiple, and contingent.

These points of distinction are of concern in considering the role of aesthetic appreciation of design in the exhibition context. In the interested gaze, aesthetic appreciation does not reside in the sensuous appeal of design's surface qualities expressed through those aspects of decoration, ornamentation and styling designed to make the object more attractive to the consumer. Rather, it lies in an understanding of the relationship between these qualities and the processes of designing (including the creative and intellectual activities of design thinking, as well as the physical processes of manufacturing and production) that are manifest in these qualities. In this way, the interested eye combines intellectual, practical and aesthetic appreciation.

Bennett argues that Bourdieu's pure gaze is historically constituted across the spatial, conceptual and institutional fields through the acts of naming and displaying, so as to compose a higher category of art governing how works of art are understood and valued by those who are able to recognise this category:

To analyse the historical processes through which the pure gaze is constituted is ... to trace the formation of those spaces and institutions in which works of art are so assembled, arranged, named and classified so as to be rendered visible as,

precisely, '*art*' just as it also to examine those forces which produce spectators capable of recognising and appreciating those works as such. (Bennett, 2005:163)

For Bourdieu the ability to recognise art as a higher category, and thereby to understand it, is demonstrated in his research as a question of class and education (Bourdieu, 1979:1986). While the consumption of design in the gallery context awaits a commensurate contemporary sociological critique, I would suggest that a historical lineage for the interested eye might also be posited, albeit in embryonic form. The rationale for doing so is to suggest that it is not an ahistorical conceit, but rather, a way of looking that is embedded in, and learned from, design's disciplinary specificity. Arguably, the interested eye emerges from accounts of the formation of design with roots in the Aristotelean element of 'forethought' (Aristotle Poetics 1450b-12 in Buchanan, 1995: 35). Buchanan describes forethought as those processes of discovery and invention, of argument and planning (op.cit) that were to become known as design thinking. The nature of design thinking continues to be a focus of research for design practitioners and academics today (Norman, 2010).

The interested gaze looks at the design exhibit as the reification of forethought into the materiality of the design object, through the processes of manufacturing and production underpinned by the end-goal of design's utility. Whereas the pure gaze is attributed with producing selective competencies of spectatorship based on class and education, the interested gaze is, potentially, available to all by virtue of design's ubiquity. While the Design Museum as the Distinctive Museum relocates design from the everyday encounter to the discreet environment of the temporary exhibition, it does so in order to enrich visitor understanding of the impact of design in its real world context, rather than to constitute design within an invisible, higher order, abstract category.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed how independent adult learning at the Design Museum is enabled through the experience of an exhibition visit, from the perspectives of visitors and curators. I have conceptualised learning as taking place in accordance with a three-fold notion of the Design Museum as, respectively, the Active Museum, the Engaging Museum and the Distinctive Museum. For each of these, I suggest that the key characteristics of learning at the Design Museum are as follows:

In respect of the Design Museum as the Active Museum, learning conceptualised as *propositional*, through the emphasis on the role of the temporary exhibition in inviting audiences to think critically and expansively about design.

In respect of the Design Museum as the Engaging Museum, learning conceptualised as *connective*, through the metaphor of the exhibition as a learning journey that brings together visual and affective dimensions with intellectual dimensions, and enables visitors to forge links between personal contexts and exhibition content.

In respect of the Design Museum as the Distinctive Museum, learning that is *specific* to the discipline of design insofar as it is informed by the history and practice of exhibition design and the contextual and contingent understanding of design inculcated through the interested eye.

In my Conclusion, I reflect on the value and implications of this conceptualisation of learning both for the Design Museum and more widely for scholarship on learning in the museum.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In conclusion I return to the final questions of my research:

How does my study contribute to professional practice at the Design Museum, and more broadly to the field of museum education?

What are the emergent questions and implications?

My research characterises the independent adult learning enabled through an exhibition visit at the Design Museum as propositional, connective and specific to the museum's disciplinary focus on design. In conclusion I move from a *characterisation* of learning in the exhibition context to a *conceptualisation* of that learning which I propose as the Productive Eye. In so doing, my aim is to formulate and articulate the findings of my research in a way that bears relevance beyond the immediate context of the Design Museum, commensurate with other relevant research in the field of museum education. Scholarship in this area is still at a nascent stage, as demonstrated by Bennett's question to Preziosi (at Tate Britain's 'Theory of the Encounter' conference in July 2010) regarding the specificity of looking in the art museum and the potential for other similarly differentiated modes of looking in different museum typologies. The demand for further research into learning in the exhibition context is further emphasized by Hooper-Greenhill, one of the most prolific researchers in the field, who latterly called attention to the extent to which museum education is under-researched and under-theorised (Hooper-Greenhill 2007:5).

i) The Productive Eye: Conceptualising Learning in the Design Museum

My concept of the Productive Eye is located alongside research in museum education that extends Bal's theoretical conceit of the expository agency of the art exhibition. Illeris (2009) suggests how such agency has engendered four broadly chronological modes of looking which she terms respectively the Disciplined Eye, the Aesthetic Eye, the Desiring Eye and the Friendly Eye. The Disciplined Eye is a mode of looking that views artworks as containing a correct or truthful reading embedded in the work's national and historical contexts; it is a mode of looking traditionally favoured or sought

by curators (here Illeris references Bryson 1983:112-114 and Fried, 1980:107-8). By contrast, the Aesthetic Eye shifts the emphasis from curatorial intention to an unmediated and pure engagement with the artwork. The normalised ideal context for this mode of looking is that of the white cube gallery in which the viewer can, ostensibly, encounter the work without undue interference from elements of exhibition display. The Aesthetic Eye relies on the viewer possessing the requisite 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1979:1984) to arrive at the state of intense absorption it purports to engender. In this mode of looking, the act of looking is not concerned with the transmission of meaning (as it is with the Disciplined Eye) but rather simply with the subjective act of 'being' with the work (here Illeris references Duncan, 1995: 16-17). The third notion, of the Desiring Eye, is a mode of looking which is highly differentiated. It presupposes that every visitor has the capacity and inclination to learn, but that this learning will happen in multifarious ways depending on the life-worlds of the viewer (and here Illeris references Hein, 1998; Gardner, 1985). Read against the Disciplined and Aesthetic Eye, the Desiring Eye suggests a more inclusive and democratic approach to learning through looking, and one which allows for polysemic responses to works. The final notion, that of the Friendly Eye, introduces dialogic, collaborative and collective ways of meaning making into the process of looking, "in organised and facilitated interactions between gestures of showing, acts of looking and strategies of establishing visual relationships" (Illeris, 2009:18).

Each of the modes of looking summarised above render the notion of learning at a glance (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007) problematic, in respect of its assumption that the act of seeing provides a natural or objective access to the world of visual culture. Instead, they posit vision and the act of looking at art as historically and socially constructed practices (Elkins, 2002) in which learning is understood as engendered through complex processes of interactions between the visitor and the whole exhibition environment, processes which involve the visitor in power relations arising from the expository agency of the exhibition.

My conceptualisation of the Productive Eye has the following key, distinguishing features:

1. The Productive Eye conceptualises learning as at the centre of the design exhibition experience, actively produced through explicit curatorial strategies.
2. The Productive Eye conceptualises learning as fully cognizant of design as an industrial process at the core of which is mass production and utility.
3. The Productive Eye conceptualises learning as enabled through the whole environment of the design exhibition, which in itself is a type of temporary production.

By virtue of the disciplinary focus and curatorial strategies informed by the specific history of exhibition design, the Productive Eye is differentiated from Illeris's extended concepts of learning in the art museum. At its core, the Productive Eye situates independent adult learning not as adjunct to the business of curating exhibitions, but as a fundamental characteristic of the work of the Design Museum. Herbert Bayer's *Diagram of Extended Field of Vision* from the 1930 Paris Expo provides a visual analogy nicely rooted in the distinctive discipline of exhibition design. In this diagram, Bayer positions the viewer at the centre of the exhibition space and arranges content to the satisfaction of the observer's field of vision. A central acknowledgement is made concerning the relationship between the viewer and the viewed. So too the Productive Eye is located at the heart of the Design Museum's mission for public education about design, through exhibitions.

Figure 7: Bayer, 'Diagram of extended field of vision' 1935, *Visual Communication, Architecture, Painting*, New York, Reinhold publishing corporation, 1967.

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ii) Implications for Professional Practice

How does my study contribute to professional practice at the Design Museum?

The significance of my thesis for professional practice at the Design Museum is found in its integrated and holistic conception of learning emerging from reflections on curatorial practice and visitor experience, rather than arising from the structured pedagogic activities programmed and delivered by the Learning Department which I explored in my IFS (Charman, 2008). While neither curatorial practice nor audience development sit within my professional remit as Head of Learning, the substantive issues underpinning the research compelled me to look beyond my departmental parapet to embrace a wider understanding of learning at the Design Museum. By working alongside the Head of Communications to organise the Visitor Research Group, and

through carrying out interviews with curatorial colleagues, this study has opened up a space within the museum for professional dialogue about learning and visitor experience which can foster shared understandings of learning. Within these understandings, visitor voice is attributed equal status alongside that of museum professionals, in line with the organisation's founding commitment to public education about design. Dialogue and shared understandings are all to the good but they need to translate into action if audience provision is to be further developed. To this end, throughout the last year of my doctoral study I have worked with colleagues at the museum to establish a museum-wide 'concept' team with the express ambition to advocate for the visitor as learner as a core component within exhibition development. The concept team is an example of the creative institutional change to which the EdD can contribute. The team provides the mechanism to develop, in an integrated manner, the museum's public programme of exhibitions and activities, interpretation strategy and programmes, and audience development initiatives and research. It also provides impetus and space for a more theoretical and reflexive approach to professional practice at the museum. Consequently, my professional knowledge and skills have been extended and deepened beyond the programming and delivery of formal learning activity, in a process that will continue beyond the life of the doctorate through the on-going work of the concept team.

iii) Implications for Museum Studies in Education

How does this study contribute more broadly to the field of museum education?

The challenge of uniting theory with practice in order to shape research that is of value both theoretically and to the day to day experience of museum professionals is raised by Conal McCarthy in his review of the third and final volume in Karp & Kratz's global museum studies trilogy. McCarthy reflects that the field of museum studies today consists predominantly of 'global' histories and theories. Arguably, one might also add to this the emergence of universal models of museum learning, as illustrated by the 'Inspiring Learning for All' framework and the model for Generic Learning Outcomes. McCarthy argues that there is a need for more localised research endeavours that bring theory and practice together reflexively:

Although the turn towards academic theory was necessary it did unhitch much research and writing from current practice. Academics and critics of every stripe have something to say about museums, which furnish convenient manifestations of any number of social and cultural theories of little use to museums, those who work in them or those who use them. (McCarthy in Karp & Kratz, 2007:183)

This concern is shared by Hilde Hein:

The challenge that museums face in a time of transition is obscured, on the one hand, by theoretical rhetoric that interprets museums from a distance and ignores their concrete vulnerabilities, and on the other, by too close a focus on the immediate exigencies of circumstance, which then discourages speculative contemplation. (Hein, H. 2000:ix)

The drive to understand practice through theory and to relate findings back to theory so as to extend or develop current debates in the field is a core feature of the EdD. It is also of particular value for the field of museum education, as yet in its formative phase when compared with sister professions such as formal education or curating. The emergent character of museum education is illustrated through a research project currently undertaken at Kings College which seeks to establish whether any common characteristics exist across the heterogeneous landscape of museum education (Tlili, 2010), and by the description of the museum profession more broadly as a gaggle of disparate occupations by David Anderson, author of *A Common Wealth* and former Director of Learning at the V&A (Anderson, 2010:17). Museum education studies that focus on the local in order to inform the global assist in affording some cogency and maturity to what is as yet a nascent field of practice.

The Productive Eye contributes to studies in museum education through integrating theory with practice. Specifically, it refines research into learning in the museum that locates learning as generic in outcome or general in character. The Productive Eye demonstrates that there is value to be found in attending to questions of specificity within the local. There is a politics to my argument insofar as specificity is a key characteristic within the paradigm of realism in the arts. Realists look at the here and now, the specifics of a localised situation, in order to debunk the generalising tendencies of the bourgeoisie (such as, for example, 'god', or 'society') as ideological constructs that enable hegemonic power relations to be maintained. However, given the focus of this study on disciplinary distinctiveness as the driver for conceptualising learning in the

Design Museum, I acknowledge its limitations in not exploring the power relations implicit in the viewer positions engendered through the concept of the Productive Eye, which underpin Bal's notion of expository agency in the art museum context. Duncan (1995), McClellan (2004) and Sandell (2002) have undertaken such research in their work examining the social relationships between visitors and exhibitions.

The Productive Eye is an important concept both for the Design Museum and for studies in museum education because it demonstrates the value of specialist subject knowledge for institutional understanding of learning. Such understanding fosters intellectual empathy between the educational role of the museum and its curatorial activity, and can effect a reprioritising of professional practice. The relationship between curating and learning in the museum has a complex history, arising from the tension between the twin responsibilities of collection care and public access. The Productive Eye, which roots visitor learning in the disciplinary specialism of the Design Museum, reconciles this tension through revealing common ground between exhibition curating and learning. The holistic and inclusive conception of learning provided through the Productive Eye weaves together the different fields of professional knowledge and activity at the Design Museum in a way that strengthens professional practice.

Developing shared understandings of learning at the Design Museum is theoretically significant and brings me full circle to my first piece of doctoral research undertaken for the Foundations of Professionalism paper. In writing about new models of professionalism in education, Hoyle and John formulate the idea of "occupational heteronomy" as one which sees professionals working authoritatively but openly and collaboratively in partnership with one another (Hoyle & John, 1995). Basil Bernstein's 1971 work on boundary spanning and collective codes is also important in this regard: he argues that "a greater integration of knowledge is likely to occur if the boundaries between the demarcations are weak rather than strong, thereby allowing a powerful collective code to emerge" (Bernstein, 1971). In the instance of the Productive Eye at the Design Museum, the historically distinct demarcations between the curatorial and educational activities and professional practices of the museum are blurred, enabling museum education professionals to adopt more informed and critical positions relating to the work of their institutions and departments, and to work productively across different areas of practice. At best, learning in the museum needs to be rooted in the

subject and curatorial practices of the museum, rather than the historic ‘bolt on’ approach described by Barrett and Tapia as dominating the twentieth century (page 121). This is not to suggest that learning is clipped and cabined within this subject, but rather, that disciplinary knowledge informs judgements about how the museum can best deliver its mission of public education.

What are the emergent questions and implications of my research?

My research reveals how learning in the exhibition context at the Design Museum is strongly informed and shaped by its typological specificity. In this case, the notion of specificity focuses on the discipline that constitutes exhibition content and exhibition design, and the curatorial strategies for displaying that content. My research calls attention to the possibility for museums to ‘learn from the learner’ by establishing a dialogic relationship between visitors and curators. At this point it is helpful to return to the logic of the case study strategy, that of gaining insights from an in-depth investigation of a particular instance, in order both to illuminate that instance and to consider the emergent wider implications for the broader context (Denscombe, 2010). The question must now be posed of the extent to which my findings might be applicable to independent visitor learning in other typologically distinct museums, each with their own disciplinary histories and curatorial approaches. But this is not research to be undertaken lightly. It is effortful, demanding that the researcher grasp the fundamental character of the disciplinary focus of the field in question and related theories about learning in museums; carry out research which positions the museum visitor and museum professional equally; and finds ways to make practical connections between the research findings and professional activity within the institution, while also, ideally, contributing to scholarship in the relevant field. In arguing for such a rigorous and holistic understanding of museum learning, I do not deny the value of the generic or generalising approach in offering an evaluative sensibility to visitor research which can garner data that is effective as an advocacy tool. Rather, I am drawing a careful distinction between research and evaluation in museum learning, and between paraxial research and abstract theorisation.

In drawing my thesis to its close I make one final observation about the implications of the Productive Eye for museum education today. As discussed in Chapter Two:

Literature Review, we are at a historical moment in which museums are going through a period of deep-seated change. The shifts in state cultural funding and policy, from Labour's three-term tenure (1997 – 2010) to today's Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition will further contribute to this process. In this, the work of museum professionals does not remain untouched. Instead, changing conceptions and practices start to manifest. It might be that the learning department devotes as much time focusing on exhibition development as it does on formal learning activities. Or it may be that exhibition curators have visitor experience uppermost in their mind when they set about conceiving an exhibition, and work alongside their colleagues in the learning and communications departments to help realise their ambitions. Professionalism in the museum becomes a question of emphasis, in which the visitor as learner is positioned at the core: today interpretation, tomorrow schools workshops, next week another Visitor Research Group and so on. As Hegel elegantly surmised in his preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, the owl of Minerva only flies at dusk (in Knowles, [1966] 2010). In this way, it is only when a particular conception of the museum (including the museum professionals who shape its activities), is passing that we can understand just what it is that is being redefined. Prospectively, new understandings of professionalism and practices in museum education will emerge from this process. But that is a matter for a different piece of research.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: IFS Extract – Learning Theory

Seminal theorists and psychologists in respect of learning in the museum include Piaget, whose theory of intellectual development in children (Piaget, 1985) moved the focus of learning from transmission and reception of knowledge to active construction of that knowledge. A central component of Piaget's developmental theory of learning and thinking is that both involve the participation of the learner. Knowledge is not merely transmitted verbally but must be constructed and reconstructed by the learner. Piaget asserted that for a child to know and construct knowledge of the world, the child must act on objects and it is this action that provides knowledge of those objects (Sigel, 1977); the mind organizes reality and acts upon it. The learner must be active; she is not a vessel to be filled with facts. Piaget's work informs that of Hooper-Greenhill (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999) whose research focuses on transmission versus constructivist models of communication and the use of hermeneutic approaches to understanding the process of meaning-making in museums. For hermeneutic philosophers, according to Hooper-Greenhill, meaning-making is shaped by the inevitability of prior knowledge, the effect of tradition, the past as it works in the present, the prejudices and biases that are part of being human, and the capacity to interrogate the past and to distinguish between productive and non productive preconceptions. The human subject in all their cultural complexity is at the centre of the process of learning. So too Vygotsky's developmental theory emphasizes the importance of culture, environment and history within a social context of learning (1978) and has much to contribute to a fuller realisation of the museum as a learning environment. Vygotskian psychology suggests that meaning emerges through the interplay between individuals acting in social environments (in this case the museum), and the mediators of that experience - in the museum context these being, for example, the exhibited artefacts, group discussion and interpretation materials as well as the individual's own cultural history and situation. A major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition; learning requires collaboration. The museum as an open learning environment (as opposed to the more structured nature of the formal classroom) clearly has much to gain from greater understanding of Vygotsky's work insofar as it pertains to the significance of social and situated learning.

Within this idea of the museum as a more open learning environment than that of the classroom, Gardner's (1983;1993) theory of multiple intelligences finds its proponents, particularly with regard to the broad vision it offers. The multiple intelligences theory put forward by Gardner is that there is not just one form of intelligence but several, relatively autonomous human intellectual competencies. He distinguishes seven forms of intelligence: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. If all seven intelligences are needed to learn effectively, learning experiences need to be created that attend to all intelligences. As Kornhaber (2001: 276) notes, this involves approaches that value "depth over breadth".

Understanding entails taking knowledge gained in one setting and using it in another, for example, extending opportunities to work on a topic by connecting and shifting the learning environment of the classroom to that of the museum.

The museum as an active learning environment has been explored by a number of theorists, the most well-known of which is George Hein. His work on constructivist learning and the constructivist museum (1994; 1995) emphasizes the active participation of the learner in making sense of their museum experience. Hein draws upon Dewey and Pepper's four world views on how knowledge is constructed to consider four learning approaches which have relevance to museums: Expository, Behaviourist, Constructivist, and Discovery Learning. He applies these to the museum to suggest the four commensurate exhibition and display paradigms: Systematic, Orderly, Constructivist and Discovery. Both expository and discovery approaches are based on the epistemological premise that knowledge exists outside the learner. However, whereas with the expository approach the learner is viewed as a vessel or warehouse to be filled with subject knowledge, the discovery learning approach is described as a more active one. It accepts the idea that learners change as they learn – that knowledge acts upon the learner to bring about changes in how their minds work.

As people learn, their capacity to learn expands; the shape and volume of the mind's warehouse is transformed by the process of grappling with the new information. (Hein, 1995: 30)

While discovery learning often involves physical interaction with the phenomena of the world – engaging with the objects, solving a puzzle – the activity is also a mental process, as much a case of ‘minds-on’ as ‘hands-on’. Proponents of discovery learning will maintain that learning situations can be constructed so as to attain pre-determined outcomes. However, discovery learning need not necessarily imply that an active process of engagement with the phenomena of the world will lead to a neat solution to a problem, or the correct answer to a question. It is as much about the process of exploring the problem or the question – about learning through doing, through thinking – as it is about arriving at a destination. In this it overlaps with aspects of constructivist learning and has strong appeal to learning within the museum context, predominantly concerned as it is with learning through and from objects. From an epistemological perspective constructivist learning has a fundamental difference to that of discovery approaches. Whereas discovery learning presupposes that knowledge exists outside the learner, constructivist learning outcomes need only be valid within the constructed reality of the learner and not in direct relation to an external, objective truth. This is not to say that constructivism endorses an ‘anything goes’ epistemology; validity arises “from the value of the concepts in leading to action (use) and in the consistency of the ideas one with another” (Hein, 1995: 34).

Hein argues that some degree of constructivism is inevitable in human life because we all interpret nature and society differently depending on the rich tapestry of our personal experiences. A constructivist museum exhibition is likely to present content from a range of differing perspectives, and to provide opportunities for learners to utilise their own life experiences in creating meaning. Critics of the constructivist approach to learning question its effectiveness, particularly when it is set up in a false dichotomy against expository learning. In brief, the argument goes that just because something is being explained or described does not mean that no learning or engagement with prior experience is taking place; indeed, some measure of ‘guided learning’ is essential for those who are new to the subject (Mayer, 2004).

From this review of key learning theories and debates in museum education, it is clear that the theoretical perspective is of fundamental concern in conceptualising learning within a museum context, informing what constitutes a good learning experience and how these experiences relate to the subject specific nature of the institution in question.

Appendix B: Examples of Visit Cards

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Appendix C: Curator permission letter

February 28, 2009

Dear _____,

This letter is an invitation to participate in a study I am conducting as part of my doctoral degree in Education at the Institute of Education, University of London. It provides you with more information about my project and outlines your involvement should you agree to participate.

My study explores the potential for an expanded concept of informal, lifelong learning across the Design Museum, developing practice within the Education Department, which is currently weighted towards structured activities for learners from formal education contexts. In working towards a more open conception of learning my intention in inviting you for interview is to better understand curatorial practice within the institution, particularly with regard to exhibition making and the intended visitor experience/s. It is hoped that the outcome of my research will be series of propositions for how the institution might build, cross-departmentally, on current good practice in order to maximize the learning experiences of adult visitors in our temporary exhibitions programme.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 90 minutes to take place at a mutually agreed time, date and location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences, by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will appear anonymised as 'Respondent A/bB/C etc in any thesis, report or publication resulting from this study. With your permission anonymous quotations will be used. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, I would be delighted to discuss them with you directly. My research proposal is currently pending clearance from the Ethics Research Committee at the Institute of Education. I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit in strengthening inter-departmental practice at the Design Museum as well as to the broader research community of Museum Studies.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Helen Charman

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Helen Charman, a doctoral student in the Department of Culture and Pedagogy at the Institute of Education, University London. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that my interview will be audio recorded to ensure an accurate transcription of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project is pending ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Committee at the Institute of Education.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree to participate in this study.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

☐ YES ☐ NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: transcript excerpt from interview with Curator A

Q: So when you talk about the immersive process, does this include the scenography of the exhibition?

A: The way he works, the fact that the collection is about exploring his history and cultural heritage, telling the story of his homeland. With the fabric you have to look very closely, it's difficult to see what's going on with the fabric, but on the wallpaper which surrounds you, it's easier to see the images. At first glance it's tourists, hotels and palm trees but actually it's about warring factions, Chalayan engaging with complex issues.

Q: What's interesting is that you've expunged the text from the walls and instead use the clever device of the wallpaper to reveal aspects of Chalayan's work, which initially one thinks of decorative design but instead it reveals something about his work concepts, his practice. So thinking about the viewer coming in to that space, what do you want for them?

A: The challenge for the curator of the Chalayan exhibition is that he does grapple with some complex issues, I grappled with them myself when trying to explain them in the guide text, and explaining clearly these concepts to the visitor. What I want is for the visitor to walk in, look closely at the wallpaper, see the work, and then be encouraged to read their guide - to walk into the space and think 'this is incredible', to be sufficiently inspired and motivated to pick up the guide and read more information, or to go on Chalayan's website or to google him and want to find out more following their visit to the exhibition. It's about stimulating that desire to learn.

Q: So how would you describe your role as the curator in this respect?

A: Yes – the idea of the curator as catalyst. If I'm inspired by something in an exhibition I will generally go away and want to find out more, and that's what I hope that an exhibition will inspire visitors to do.

Q: Can you describe your ideal design museum visitors?

A: I don't think visitors have any responsibility. I think we have responsibilities as curators to the visitor. An exhibition will attract a specialist, someone who knows a great deal about that subject area, and visitors who don't, who have a general interest but not an in-depth knowledge. So we then have a responsibility to draw that visitor into the exhibition, to keep them there, and to offer them an experience. The hope is that they learn something they are not familiar with; they are coming away with something. It's very important to me that memories of an exhibition stay with the visitor - that visitors come away with an understanding, new information.

Q: I would describe that as a resonant experience, that is, an experience that stays with you because it's meaningful in some way to the visitor, and this is interesting and challenging because one cannot second-guess what those points of connection or interest will be. So thinking further about the idea of

creating a resonant, immersive experience on behalf of the visitor, do certain works engender that particular sort of experience more than others?

A: No - I think you can take that approach with any subject.

Q: So it's about what we might call the scenography?

A: Yes, exhibition design and interpretation is key to the process. The tools of engagement are so varied and rich. I can't wait to move on with the interpretation strategy.... there's so much available to the curator now with which to engage the visitor, but, ultimately, it's the feel of an exhibition. We have a 'black box' on the first floor, for example, and we need to make that feel different for every exhibition – that is the role of the exhibition designer, to conceive a new and different environments. I have watched museum visitors over the years and the worst thing possible is to see someone walk in, around the show quickly and then walk out again. That's a failure. A successful exhibit is one in which people actively want to interrogate the work and in which people dwell for longer than they might have planned.

Appendix D: Visitor Research Group Permission Letter**DESIGN
MUSEUM**

May 5, 2009

Dear ,

This letter is an invitation to participate in a discussion group researching Visitor Experience of the Design Museum's temporary exhibitions. It provides you with more information about the project and outlines your involvement should you agree to participate. The focus group research has been devised with the following aims & outcomes:

Aims

- To better understand visitor motivations for, and expectations of, a visit to Design Museum exhibitions
- To explore how visitors engage with exhibitions, including responses to exhibition design and interpretation material
- To identify how the Museum can build on its current offer to exhibition visitors

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve your commitment of 3 hours on **Tuesday 12th May** between **6pm and 9pm**, which includes a 'refresher' exhibition visit and a 2 hour discussion group led by an independent researcher. You may decline to answer any of the discussion group questions if you so wish. The interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and transcribed for analysis. All information you provide is considered completely confidential and is to be used for internal research purposes only. Your name will appear anonymously as 'Respondent A/B/C' etc in any report or publication resulting from this study. With your permission anonymous quotations will be used. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this discussion group.

If you have any questions regarding this research, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, I would be delighted to discuss them with you directly and can be contacted on the email or telephone number below. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Helen Charman, Head of Learning

Design Museum, Shad Thames, London SE1 2YD

Contact: helen@designmuseum.org. Tel: 020 79408264 (Mon – Wed)

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Helen Charman, Head of Learning, Design Museum, London. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that my interview will be audio recorded to ensure an accurate transcription of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in research reports and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree to participate in this discussion group.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any research report or publication that comes of this research.

☐ YES ☐ NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Visitor Research Group Data Excerpt

Bill: When you're browsing about as someone who does something that is very factually based, like Automotive design, and you're going into this Art world. it can be a little bit daunting in a way because you're always looking at practicalities of things and thinking how can I make people enjoy this on a mass scale. Or get the enjoyment that individuals get out of this on a mass scale for everyone. So I'm always thinking about everyone when I go to anything. The fashion student part of it was part of the experience but at the same time because I'm not part of that group, it's just a mass of crowd.

Marnie, what about the reason you came?

- I'm very interested the work of Hussein Chalayan for a long time. I saw the skin and bones exhibit and one of my favourite parts was the table and I just wanted to come and see that. The first time I came to the DM was to see the Zaha Hadid exhibition which was about 2 years ago. I just loved it. I loved that it was a small museum and I thought that it was forward thinking and the way they presented the display and the captions and everything. So, that's the reason, why I came back and it was just straight to the Hussein Chalayan exhibit.

I'd like to take everybody back, those that are regular visitors and those who are newer to it, just ask you to think about your very first impressions when you arrived at the DM. Basically, how would you describe it to a friend, when you arrived and you came through the front door what were your first impressions of the place?

- It's very small ... I don't mean small in a negative way ... I mean accessible
- Do-able
- it's not intimidating... cos I mean some of those others (museums)... I went to the V&A today and basically it's just too big. Whereas this is cute, cosy... you know. Little shop, little entrance...

Was it smaller than you expected it to be?

- I suppose it might have been. Probably just slightly smaller.
- But then I'm pleased it was.

Bill: I've never found the smallness bad. I think the smallness is quite nice cos it almost forces you [DM] to change what might be inside. You haven't got room to build up stock like the British Museum.

- I quite like being quite boxed. So what I did, I went round about three times and I quite like that. I do my first, and then I looked at things a bit differently and then so it forced me by being small... I think I looked at things a lot more than I would normally.

Bill: It's quite small and square and it allows you that freedom of just zipping round at your own pace.

- But also the way they constructed the areas. The museum's done brilliantly - there's written information, there's visual information, you might have a film, you might have the product in front of you, things are hanging from the ceiling, things are hanging on the walls, things are right in front of you ... you're walking around a big space, you're walking around a small space, it's light, it's dark...
- Then it's very dark, yeah....
- I quite like that.
- You'd be thinking, I'll continue walking around the light area and I'm walking around the edges and you'd think, you want to go back in there...
- You know, the little room upstairs, I didn't even see that the first time in BIDOY exhibit.... You go down past the bicycle, then you turn right and then there's this dark space and I didn't even notice that at all... I think the darkness, I don't know, I totally missed that the first time.

Bill: With the Hussein exhibition, all the little signals kept me interested even though I didn't really know what was going on.

- Which one are you talking about now?

Bill: The Hussein.

Just coming back to your journey into the place. You arrive here, it's the first time you've ever been....

- It looks like a design museum.

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